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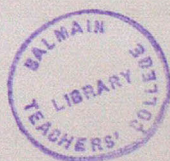
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DUNCAN M^cCLURE

BEING PART II. OF "*The Poor Parson*"

BY

STEELE RUDD

(A. H. DAVIS)

AUTHOR OF "On Our Selection," "Our New Selection,"

"Sandy's Selection;" "Back at Our Selection."

*With seventeen illustrations by Syd. Smith
and Harry Julius*

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CHAPTER I.

The Pioneers.

THE sun went down on a blazing, blistering summer day. A stiff, cool breeze sprang up and fanned the sun-baked earth, and sobbed and soughed in the cornstalks and in the dense and darkened forest trees. Under the shadows of the barn a pair of plough horses, eye deep in nose-bags, crunched and crunched at their feed. From the sheep-fold came the last bleats of the ewes as the flock settled restfully for the night. From a vessel set at the back-door a pair of collies noisily lapped up the table leavings.

A light streamed through the open cracks of the crude, temporary dwelling.

Inside, the pioneers, father and two sons, sat back from the tea table, silent, reflectful. Scotch people they were, from Loch Lomond—Scotch people with a broad accent and big hearts—new arrivals with a faith as strong as their Presbyterianism in the future of the new land, the great bushland, the wide, torrid Queensland. They believed in land—these Scotch pioneers, and in sheep,

and in wheat, and in horses, and cows—in all things, in fact, pertaining to the soil—and the soul. And they believed in these things just as they believed in the Bible, and John Knox. They believed in these things the more when others around them, overtaken by floods and droughts and fires, lost heart and hope, and cried curses down upon the new land, and, like the Israelites, murmured against their lot, and prayed to the Lord for deliverance.

The father and sons became known in the district—in the new bush district of Wooten-binbee—as old Sandy McClure, and Colin and Duncan McClure. The sons were of middle-age; burly, bulky, big-framed, red-whiskered men, with square-cut heads, big feet and humorous eyes. The parent, or the “heidmon” as he was styled domestically, was an undersized, wiry, old veteran with a large, inquisitive head, characteristic features, and an obsolete parsonic shave. A fiery, boisterous, stern, exacting, strong-willed, crabby, old warrior he was; yet just, high-principled and painfully honourable.

The “heidmon” glanced round at a crude side-table supporting a bulky, well-worn family Bible, and said:

“Didna ony o’ ye fetch the newspaper th’ day?”

“Oh, be th’ hokey,” Duncan answered, rising hurriedly to reach down the weekly mail from a shelf above his head—
“there’s a ggreat fat letter for ye. There must be a deil

o' a lot o' news in 't. It weighs as heavy as Cain's conscience maun a' done when he knocked his wee brither on th' heid."

"Be th' kin o' write I think it's frae Jean," Colin put in prophetically, as his brother handed over the mail.

"I think it maun be hers, for ye canna mistake Jean's write," Duncan added, with just a suspicion of mischief in his eye. "Jean hasna ony idea o' art. She serawls a' roon th' envelope, y' ken, like th' heidmon hissels'."

"E-ech!" in a prolonged groan from the stern-visaged old man, as he broke open the seal and extracted several sheets of closely-written and cross-written notepaper, and leaned back to read it.

Duncan winked good naturedly at his brother, and paying no further heed to the parent, who ~~was~~ absorbed in his daughter's letter, opened a conversation across the table with Colin.

"Wha th' deuce was that cove," he asked, "wi' a rag fleein' frae his hat like a tail o' a sark wha was crackin' tae ye at th' corn paddiek aboot three o'clock?"

"I didna ken him frae Adam," Colin answered slowly. "He was tryin' terrible hard to explain something or ither tae me aboot his farm or his auld woman or some one, but I couldna mak heid nor tail o' him. He stuttered something awfu'."

"*That's* th' beggarin' chap," Duncan exclaimed, with

beaming face. "He came ower tae th' plough tae me and stood glowering for th' deil's own time at a furrow I just opened. It was a middlin' straight furrow, ye ken, for a wunner, and he couldna see what kin' o' a mark it was I had tae guide mysel by. The flagpole I had put up was richt outside th' paddock a'th'gither, an' he had his back tae it, an' couldna see ahint him."

"'W-w-what aire y' g-g-g-goin be?' he stuttered oot. an' I sez to him, pretendin' I didna unnerstan'—'Oh, I'm gaun be th' bloomin' sun, but there's a lot of beggarin' clouds about th' dey?'

"'Goin' be th' s-s-s-sun!' he spluttered wi' a look o' rreal consternection in his ee!

"'Yers,' I answered, quite loud at him—'It's th' best way if ye want tae pleugh straight. It's far better than——' "

"*Hard yer tangle,*" the heidmon broke out in a roar. The sons looked at him. But as his eyes remained fixed on the letter and his lips working rapidly, Duncan deemed it safe to proceed.

"'It's better than flags?' I said tae him, 'an' it's no sae much trouble, ye ken. Ye havena got tae put it up.' "

They both laughed at the expense of the absent stranger.



"GOIN' BE TH' S-S-S-SUN!" HE SPLUTTERED.

“ ‘W-w-weel I’m blawed!’ he said,” Duncan went on—
‘th-th-that’s a wr-r-r-rinkle if ye l-l-l-like.’ ”

“De ye tell me he said that, truly?” Colin asked in confirmation of the stranger’s simplicity.

“Be th’ hokey he ded that, Colin,” Duncan affirmed with great solemnity. “An’ efter a while he began tae think it oot for hissel’ an’ keeked at the sun a deuce o’ a lot o’ times.”

“ ‘But I d-d-don’t see how ye can g-g-g-go be it,’ he said, ‘when it sh-sh-shifts,’ thinkin’ tae bowl me oot, maybe.’ ”

“ ‘That’s just whaur ye’re wrang,’ I said, an’ waved me haun’ about i’ th’ air like a parrson i’ th’ pu’pit. ‘Th’ sun doesna shift at a’,’ I said, gi’en him a bit o’ science. Dinna ye ken it’s the erth ye’re stannin’ on, mon, that, revolves aroon’ th’ sun?’ an’ bless me, he said ‘he didna,’ an’ I lauched at him. ‘Why blaw it, ye dinna ken muckle i’ this country,’ I telt him, ‘if ye dinna ken tae pleugh by th’ sun. It’s a’ th’ faishion i’ Scotland.’ An’ he just managed tae squirt oot that he ‘wer d-d-d-daimed?’ when——”

There was another interruption.

‘Are ye daft?’ the heidmon roared; still without looking up, and closely perusing the letter. Duncan paused a

moment, and, looking slyly toward his parent, continued in a suppressed voice:

“An’ just when he telt me he was daimed, Colin, the heidmon’s voice”—(glancing again at the solemn sire)—“rrattled on the air ahint us like a clap o’ thunner, an’ made us baith jump an’ look reon.” Colin smothered his feelings with a bag of oatmeal that lay on the table.

“An dang it if he wasna hangin’ on wi’ one haun’ tae th’ flagpole that I had stuck i’ th’ grund, an’ wi’ th’ ither was wavin’ his crummuck.

“‘Tak’ ye a braw new hay fork to guide ye’re crooked ee by?’ he yelled—‘ye careless yokel, I’ll bash ye’re heid wi’ it!’” (Another sly glance at the heidmon.) “‘By crikey,’ I said tae th’ cove, ‘th’ auld heidmon’s in a deil o’ a rage wi’ someone, ye better slither!’ An’ be cripes, he cleared for his vara life wi’oot knowin’ how I had lee’d tae him.”

The heidmon lifted his eyes at last, and glared at the sons.

“Wunna ye e’er gi’ ower yer gabblin’?” he shouted—
“wunna ye?”

Then after a pause:

“Hae ye nae thochts o’ sympathy at a’ for ye’re sister in sair distress wi’ the worl’, an’ her ten puir faitherless bairns! . . . Ah, me!” and a troubled sigh escaped him.

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THE HEIDMON LIFTED HIS EYES AT LAST.

The big burly sons became grave and concerned, and feelingly enquired for the welfare of their widowed sister.

"I'll gi' it tae ye in fu'." And the heidmon in loud solemn tones read the letter.

"Puir Jean!" Colin said, "It's peetifu'! She canna be left tae battle alane wi' sae many wee anes withoot assistance."

"By jove, no," Duncan said, as though that side of the situation had just occurred to him. Then by way of suggestion: "Couldna we bring them a' up here?"

"'Tis what's vexin' my ain min'," the parent answered, and rising from the table he tramped the room in thought and reflection, at intervals sighing: "Ah me; ah, me."

Colin spoke.

"I think she'd be a lot better——" But he didn't finish.

"Haud ye're tangle!" shouted the heidmon at the top of his voice.

Colin held his tongue.

Then:

"I hae solved it," and the heidmon paused suddenly, and faced round.

"I' th' morn I'll gang mysel tae that drucken scallaway, Skein, out-by, an' gie what he askit for his shanty

o' a dwellin'. Th' railway line is a'maist builded noo, an' he'll hae nae main custom for his grog. It's made o' wither board an' guid iron's on the roof, an' wad mak them a hame an dae for to start a bit sma' store."

"By jove! yers," Duncan answered enthusiastically—"that's a gran' idea."

But Colin didn't go into raptures over it. Colin had "doots about the success o' a store i' th' wild woods whaur there was only aboot sax or seeven families a'th'gither in th' deestrie'."

The Heidmon went off the handle. He struck the table hard with his fist and yelled:

"Wunna ye e'er get gumption intae ye're wooden heid? Sax families in a' th' deestrie'! Ay, an' be th' tame th' bairns can follow th' pleugh wunna there be sax hunner think ye? Whare in a' th' Lord's earth, unner a' his blue sky tell me is there sic a gran' land? Sax families in a' th' deestrie'! Ay, an' it's saxpence an acre th' noo, but wunna ye live an' wunna my ain sel live tae see th' day when 'twill be *saxteen* poon' an acre? Wha'll deny it? *Wha?*" And his chest heaved, and his eye flashed fire.

Then ignoring Colin and turning sharply to Duncan:

"Get ye per an' ink the noo an' write ye th' puir body an' tell her a' we hae planned. If she disna prosper say ye, I'll gie my ain word she wunna starve." And while

Duncan procured the writing material and commenced the letter the heidmon paced the room again

Duncan paused in his labours to moisten the pen with his large, red tongue, and leaning heavily on his elbows said: "By jove, this is a grreat plan. It's far better than they should a' stick doon there i' th' city. If she doesna mak' a lot out o' th' store it winna maitter a fig. Look at a' th' spare grub we hae roon' us here. They need never want for a dish o' spuds or a bloomin' pumpkin, or a leg o' mutton——"

"Eeh, mighty!" the heidmon bellowed, "canna ye stop blawin' tae yoursel'!"—and as he paused in his stride the end of one of the floor boards elevated itself, and pointed at the rafters where a number of swallows were roosting—"an' get on wi' whaat ye're daein."

Duncan got on with the letter, and as the heidmon continued his pacing, the up-ended board fell back into position with a loud rattle behind him. Colin, who meanwhile had taken down a violin and was screwing at the keys of it, looked up in surprise.

"Whaat was that?" the heidmon asked, looking all round the room.

Duncan glanced up and chuckled. Duncan was familiar with the eccentricities of the floor. He had seen the board performing before.

"Whaat was it?" the heidmon persisted noisily.

"Nothing," Duncan said, with a broad grin, "ainly th' bloomin fluir boards jumpin' up tae hit someane i' th' ee."

"Ech! ye dinna talk sense," the heidmon growled, and going to the door, opened it and yelled into the night—"Detchie! Detchie!" and the two collies responded in frolicking bounds. And while he talked to them in language which only they could understand, Colin, thinking of the floor, said:

"'Tis a guid job, Duncan, we haena got wives, else we'd hae to fix th' boards, I'm thinkin'."

"By jove! I dinna ken that," Duncan replied, labouring hard with the pen. "If we'd 'a ta'en wives"—(a pause)—"we could hae set them"—(another pause)—"to nailing th' boards doon for us." (A further pause.) "How d'ye think that big ane that rins aboot the scrub out-by wi' bare feet wad suit ye, Colin?"

"Weel, th' fluir wadna suit her," the other answered. "I wad be a' ma time pu'in' splinters out o' her feet."

"Hae ye feenished?" the heidmon shouted, closing the door on the dogs and turning to the light again.

"I'm just on th' last word," came calmly from Duncan. "I've been addin' a piece frae mysel'."

"Read it," the parent commanded sternly.

Duncan read the epistle over with difficulty.

"Ech!" the heidmon grunted disparagingly; "it isna put th'gither at a'. A wean could do nae worse."

Duncan's eyes twinkled.

"I'm a bit nateral in expreesion, maybe," he drawled in extenuation, "tae mak' a guid deeplomat. I just ca' a spade a spade."

Then, as he folded the letter and placed it in the envelope:

"Dae ye ken what a' these colonial chaps ca' a spade?"

"Ech! I dinna," grunted the heidmon, contemptuously.

"A (blanky) shovel!" Duncan said, cold-bloodedly.

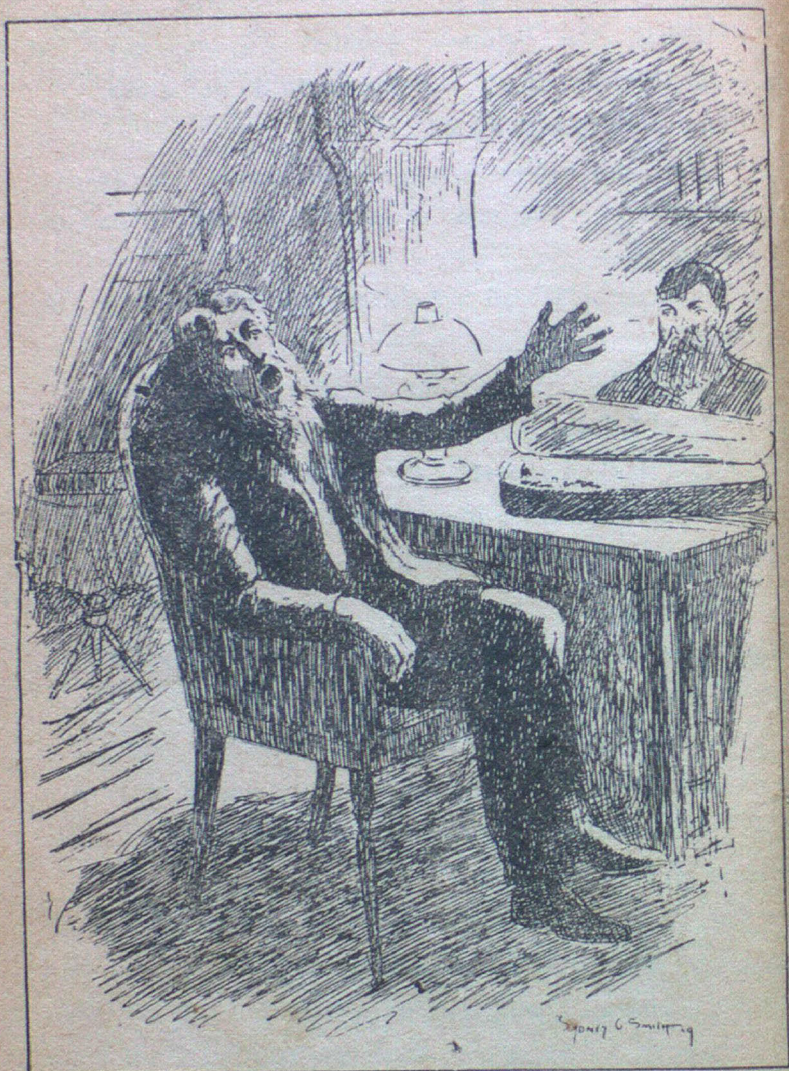
The heidmon drew himself up to his full height, while his drooping underlip curled like a ringlet of hair.

"Hoot awa'!" he roared. "Daur ye mak' sic an ungodly speech an' th' Bible starin' ye i' th' vara ee? I'm sair shamed o' it. Claes ye th' letter!"

Duncan took the reproof in grave silence, but Colin, to conceal his feelings, hugged the violin closely, while in a weird, mournful manner he rasped out the air to "The Bonnie Hills of Scotland."

The heidmon, casting a final look of reproach at the imperturbable Duncan, sank into an old-fashioned arm-chair lined with bagging, and leaning forward fell into reflection.

"Ay! Ay!" he sighed, when the strains of the violin



SUDDENLY HIS VOICE WAS LIFTED.

ceased. "Th' Bonnie Hills o' Scotland! . . . Ah, me!"

His eyes remained fixed on the floor. Suddenly his voice was lifted, and in mellow, broken tones he sang:

*"Th' bonnie hills o' Sco-ot-ian', I never mair may see,
An' nae spot sae dear in a' the worl' as those bonnie hills tae me."*

He broke off, and supporting his elbows on his knees, and resting his chin in his palms, remained swaying gently from side to side till the old-fashioned family clock, that had graced the walls of his ancestors in the Highlands, struck ten. "Ah, me!" he murmured, and pulling himself together rose and approached the side-table.

A few minutes later his voice was heard reading a chapter from the huge family Bible.



CHAPTER II.

The Country Store.

FOR three years now Mrs. Stewart had been settled in her country store at Wooten-binbee to which she had come in answer to her brother Duncan's letter. It was not a large store. It was a store and dwelling in one. The widow's humble dining-room opened into it; and when customers happened along she would put aside her sewing or leave her baking-board to serve in the shop. Customers didn't happen along very frequently, though. When they did chance to turn up, however, it was for a bag of flour, or a bag of sugar, or a chest of tea. Money wasn't thrown away by the inhabitants of Wooten-binbee in those days. It didn't require the income to keep them that it does now. If they procured sufficient to feed and clothe themselves and their numerous offspring they were content. It was no use being discontented. They couldn't afford to invest in much else. And if credit were denied them for that little until "after the harvesting," which was nearly always put off for a number of seasons, they would have had to refrain from investing at all, and go out into the wildest

parts of their paddocks and became a lot of John the Baptists, and pioneer the land on grasshoppers and wild honey. But their hearts were full of hope, and they had rare confidence in the new land, had those old pioneers. And in return the widow gained confidence in them, and trusted them with bag of flour after bag of flour, and looked to Providence to see her through. And somehow Providence always seemed to come along just when the sun was about to set on her troubles, and see her through.

The old "heidmon" and Colin and Duncan McClure used to come along too, sometimes, and visit the little store. The heidmon mostly came to discuss the business side of it with his daughter; Colin merely to see how his sister and all the youngsters were getting along; Duncan to poke about behind the counter and like a big school-boy examine curiously the articles that were displayed on the shelves.

"By jove!" said Duncan one day, when his eyes rested on a concertina case. "What th' deuce hae ye in that thing, Jean?"

Mrs. Stewart enlightened him.

"Well, I'm blawed. I never had a guid look at ane," and Duncan opened the case and extracted the instrument.

"Crikey!"—pushing his fat, dumpy fists into the straps—"there's a cove up at th' scrub wha has one o' these an' from our verandah we can hear him playin' it like th' vera

deil every nicht. . . I wonder if they're anyways hard tae learn."

Mrs. Stewart thought Duncan "wouldna have vera much trouble to learn, seein' as how he could blaw th' pipes."

"But this is a lot deeferent," Duncan said, expanding the concertina almost to bursting point, and eyeing the ribs of it closely. "Look at a' th' bloomin' keys it has."

Here a traveller, with a swag on his back, followed by Mrs. O'Moore, from the plains, came in to purchase things, and Mrs. Stewart left Duncan and passed behind the counter. She attended to Mrs. O'Moore first.

"Can y' play, mate?" the traveller asked of Duncan.

"Cripes, I can't, can you?" Duncan answered.

"Could a bit one time."

"Well, gi' us a bloomin' tune, now," and Duncan handed over the concertina to the traveller.

"Looks a pretty good one," the traveller said, with admiration in his eye. Then seating himself on the counter he commenced to play an Irish jig.

Duncan, with his head on one side, and his hands stuffed in the pockets of his broad trousers, stood watching him intently.

It had been a long time since Mrs. O'Moore had heard such music, and it was too much for her. It stirred her

into action. She turned from the counter and taking a grip of her skirts started to rattle her feet on the shop floor and to twirl about as if she had been caught in a whirlwind.

Duncan got a great surprise. He took his hands from his pockets and said: "Cripes! look at this."

Mrs. Stewart leaned over the counter and enjoyed Mrs. O'Moore.

The musician quickened the time. Mrs. O'Moore gave a loud whoop and quickened *her* time.

"Go it, ol' girrl," Duncan said.

Mrs. O'Moore "went it."

"Crikey!" Duncan said, "she's as nimble as a two-year old." But soon Mrs. O'Moore reached her limit, and, with a gasp and a shriek, stopped and returned to the counter again.

"By hokey, but ye're a guid dancer," Duncan said to her. Then turning to the musician: "An' this chap can play that thing like the deil."

Mrs. O'Moore laughed. The traveller started to play more.

"Would ye believe I could dance?" Duncan said, looking at Mrs. O'Moore.

"I-I-I-wouldn't, then," Mrs. O'Moore, who had an impediment in her speech, answered bluntly. "You-you-you-you're too fat, and-and-and-weighty."



MRS. O'MOORE QUICKENED Her TIME.

Duncan McClure

"By jove! I'm no that fat," Duncan answered, without moving a muscle of his face. "I'm a pretty smart tellow, and I'll dance a Scotch dance for ye, just to show ye."

To the musician: "Can ye play 'Gillie Callum'?"

"Play *what*?" the musician said with a grin.

Duncan whistled the air, and said—"That?"

The musician shook his head again, and grinned some more.

"Well, play any bloomin' thing ye like," and Duncan hitched up his pants and walked around the floor.

The musician played "anything," and Duncan with one hand above his head, started dancing the Highland Fling. He danced like a man who regarded dancing as a serious matter. The flooring sank and creaked under his sixteen stone weight; the shop seemed to rock and roll about like a ship.

"You'll hae th' place doon," Mrs. Stewart called out. But Duncan didn't hear her.

Several tins of jam and some sardines left the shelving and thumped the counter.

"*Duncan!*" Mrs. Stewart called out in alarm.

Still Duncan didn't hear her.

There was a loud crash. The floor gave way and let a lot of Duncan through.

"My! my! what hae ye done?" Mrs. Stewart cried. Mrs. O'Moore threw herself about and laughed noisily. The musician stopped, and laughed too.

"Wha hae I done?" Duncan echoed, lifting himself up slowly. "Hurt me bloomin' shin; that's a'."

"Ech! ye're awfu' foolish." And Mrs. Stewart proceeded to serve Mrs. O'Moore.

Duncan puffed hard, and rubbed his shin.

"Ye ought tae buy that thing," Duncan said, addressing the traveller, after he had got his wind.

"Oh, I dunno," the traveller drawled. "How much is it?"

"Oh!" Duncan answered lightly, "about a couple o' quid," and added: "It has a gran' tone."

"I'd want th' whole bloomin' shop for that. Give us a couple of figs o' tobacco, missus," and the traveller slipped from his place on the counter.

Mrs. Stewart finished serving, and the customers left the shop.

"Did ye hear me tryin' to sell th' concertina to that cove for y', Jean?" Duncan said, gazing out the door.

"He didna want it, I suppose," Mrs. Stewart answered thoughtfully.

"He wanted it a' richt, Jean. I could tell that by th'

wayhe was huggin' it so close, ye ken. But it was the price that stuck in his gizzard."

"But how did ye ken th' price, Duncan?" Mrs. Stewart asked.

"I didna ken th' bloomin' price at a', Jean; I just telt him he could hae it for a couple o' quid."

"It doesna surprise me that he didna tak' it, then, for it's only eight and six."

Just then Mrs. O'Moore re-entered the shop in a hurry.

"I-I-I-damn near forgot an axe-handle," she said. And Duncan, smiling broadly, turned away and entered the dining-room, where Lily, the eldest girl in the Stewart family, was engaged setting the table for dinner.

"That auld Irish woman out there," he said, "is a rum stick. Do ye ken what she said th' noo, Lily?"

"What, uncle?" and Lily smiled in anticipation.

"She said"—and Duncan closed his eyes and contorted his features, and spoke like Mrs. O'Moore—"I-I-I damn near forgot an axe-handle!"

Lily shrieked, and Duncan, opening his eyes, stared solemnly through a window that over-looked the yard. Several of the boys trailing past in silent procession attracted him.

"What th' deuce dae thae chaps reckon their doing?" he asked.

"They're burying a hen, I think," Lily answered.
"One died last night."

"Oh, ghost! so they are. That's just what it is, and they're givin' it a bloomin' funeral," and Duncan drew nearer the window.

"One o' them has a spade," Duncan went on, making discoveries; "he'll be the undertaker, I suppose. And little Andrew has saething in his haun that looks like a prayer book. He'll be the parrson."

Duncan chuckled and turned from the window.

"Boys do funny bloomin' things, don't they?" he added after a silence. "What thae chaps are doin' noo reminds me of a good joke I played on Colin when we were both youngsters. Colin, ye ken, had an auld speckled hen that he thocht th' deil o', an' one day I let fly a stane at a neighbour's dog that was comin' after our eggs and killed this hen o' Colin's as dead as Julius Cæsar."

Lily was seized with a fit of merriment.

Duncan proceeded: "By jove! I got a deil of a fright when I saw auld Speck give her last kick, and stretch herself out. An' I didn't know what to do, so I just sneaked away like a murderer and left her there. And next day, when Colin found her, there was grreat lamentation. He cried like billy-o about her; and I cried too. I felt, ye ken, if I didn't cry profusely he'd suspect me. Sae we both sat

there beside her and wept for the deil's ain time. And when we had made oursels seeck a'most wi' grief, we decided tae pay a last treebute o' respect tae her and gie her a real decent funeral."

Lily sat to enjoy her uncle.

"We put her remains in a perambulator, and Colin, draped in a black skirt o' your grandmither's, pulled it along. But, Lord, Lily, I couldna tell ye what a bloomin' hypocrit I felt mysel' when I was followin' along as chief mourner."

Lily, laughing, rose and ran out to the kitchen.

The customers having gone, Mrs. Stewart returned to the dining-room.

"Hello!" Duncan broke out, "did auld mother O'Moore get her axe-handle?"

"The pair auld body," Mrs. Stewart said, and sat down.

Lily came in with a hot joint on a dish. "And didn't Uncle Colin ever find out who killed his hen?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," Duncan drawled. "I always meant, ye ken, tae mak' a clean breast o' it, an' clear ma conscience."

"And you told him?"

"Yes; one day, about sixteen year after, when he was in a good humour, I said tae him, lookin' straight at him: De ye ken wha killed Speck, Colin?"

“‘No,’ he said, opening his eyes as wide as two water-holes.

“‘*I did!*’ I said.” And Duncan chuckled and took up his old felt hat.

“‘But ye’ll wait for dinner, Duncan?’” Mrs. Stewart said. “‘Canna ye not see it’s a’ ready on th’ table?’”

“‘By jove! no, Jean. I’m in a tearin’ hurry,’” Duncan answered, striding to the door. “‘If I wasna back before dinner the auld heidmon would swear his heid off.’”

And Duncan left.



CHAPTER III.

A Word in Season.

DUNCAN McCLURE fell in love, and married and settled down on a farm in the district of Narralane.

The settlers of Narralane were ambitious people and desired to push their district along. At Duncan's instigation they formed themselves into a Progressive Association and began operations by establishing a debating society.

A man from the city who wrote books and contributed to newspapers was invited to come along and deliver the inaugural address. He came along one evening to Mr. McClure's barn and was honoured with a large gathering.

Duncan McClure was voted to the chair.

The man from the city rose and said: "Gentlemen, this is not to be a discourse on drink, or heat-waves, or water bags, or a political address. It's a subject you will all understand. It's a little chat on 'Farmers and their Deficiencies.'

"Touching first, then, on the keen delights, the aid and direct benefits to be derived by both young and old alike.



"A LITTLE CHAT ON 'FARMERS AND THEIR DEFICIENCIES.'"

Duncan McClure

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from such a society as you propose to establish, I venture to voice the opinion that there is no form of leisure study followed anywhere in the world at the present day that so sharpens and cultivates the intellect—that so readily draws a student to the shelves of a library—that enables him to shape his ideas and give them fit expression—that qualifies him to hold his own in the struggle to maintain his individual rights and public interests so confidently and competently as a training in a well-conducted debating class. And whether he be farmer, propagandist, preacher, patriot, politician or pig-buyer, the same thing applies, and the same advantages will accrue to him. And I know of no man in the community to whom such a training would be of greater assistance than the farmer. And I know of no class who, by their reticence and silence, and by leaning heavily upon the other fellow for intellectual support, so obviously display their own deplorable neglect and deficiency in this same respect as my estimable friends and brethren, the farmers.

“And why is it so with the farmer? It is not because he hasn’t the necessary brains! Not because he has not been given the ground-work of a fair education—but simply because after leaving school—the time when he should only be about to begin to learn something, his young brain is permitted to rest—to get dusty,

and rusty, and clogged with cob-webs. To make and amass money he is unfortunately taught, by precept and example, is the sole and only noble object in life; that money is all that is worth working and living for. Literature, music, art, or science of any kind, doesn't even appear on the dim horizon of his golden ambition. As he matures, his cows, and his horse and sulky, and his numerous barb-wire gates that frequently maim himself and his best horse, and keeps society and the bailiff from getting near the premises, are his oil-paintings, his only art gallery. The local newspaper which prints the highest price for produce, and is loudest and longest in reviling the political party which he doesn't believe in, is *his only literature*. And he doesn't want or seek any other sort of literature. It's quite good enough for *him!* The weeping and wailing of the tall cornstalks when a breeze is fanning them on a hot day and the pens of fat porkers squealing their lungs out when the buyer takes a fancy to them, form his one idea of sublime music and melody; the only music worth cultivating, he reckons, and the only melody worth listening to. And amongst these earthly blessings he plods along, putting in his eternal daily rounds, rising with a lantern to milk in the morning and racing home in the sulky from somewhere or other in the evening to milk some more before it gets too dark to see the cows' teats. His conversation is painfully limited, and

chained to circumstance and time. It is mostly of the earth, earthy; and, like his cheese and butter, is raised on the farm—made on the premises. It generally runs on the lucerne, or on the dry grass. Frequently it is confined to the yard or the windmill, or the factory-meeting, or the bull with the long pedigree that he gave a fiver for at a sale of a pensioned-off herd of dairy cattle. The pedigree is regarded as a valuable asset, and becomes a family heir-loom. The bull itself doesn't matter. He is allowed to roam and invariably goes off in the night with the principal barb-wire gate on his horns to make love somewhere.

“Seldom, if ever, will the farmer trust himself to take an active part in a movement where a discussion is necessary and his interests involved. He feels and confesses he *should* make himself heard, but never having *heard* his own voice lifted by itself, he doesn't like the sound of it. His voice is the only ghost that haunts him and it haunts him frequently and effectively—and he dreads letting it out of its dark recesses for an airing. Occasionally, at long and pre-meditated intervals though, he breaks out in a violent place, and threatens to proceed to the railway station to meet the Commissioner face to face and place a grievance before that great official with the force of several large sledge-hammers. He goes perilously near carrying out the threat, and meets the Commissioner right where he said he would. The

Commissioner meets him, too, just as he has met hundreds of him before, and invites him into his 'special' carriage. The natural reserve and terrible mental torture of the uncertainty of the moment dispel all the sledge-hammer resolutions, and leave him limp and badly beaten. The Commissioner has done all the talking for him, and told him a lot of things that he didn't want to know, and at the end warns him to get out before the train starts and over-carries him. And he gets out—stumbles out—falls out like an elephant. And, gentlemen, I might continue dilating on this weak and unhappy feature of the farmer until the next train comes along or your cows come home to be milked and walloped in the bails. But I think I have said enough on that point for a while at all events.

"I have already remarked that the sole ambition of the farmer, as he employs himself to-day, is to make money, and to make it at the sacrifice of all other accomplishments, and the higher and nobler pursuits in life; and lest you should be inclined to forget it, gentlemen, I intend to say it again, and, if possible, to say it much *harder*, before sitting down. My experience teaches me that outside the four picturesque corners of the cow-yard the farmer never thinks or displays a thought worth tuppence. What force it chiefly is that propels the wheels of the universe he never has time to think out or to worry himself about. He doesn't want to

think about it, and he hasn't learnt how to think about it, anyway. He is a worshipper of brawn and horse-power and pump handles, and from the scant time he devotes to books which represent the lives and life-work, and are the fruits of the best brains the world has known, it would seem it never occurs to him that there is such a thing as thought-power. It was *thought*-power which made Christendom, and discovered America, to quote a well-known author. Horse-power may send a steamer over the Atlantic in seven or eight days, but thought-power will send a message across in as many seconds. And, besides, it was thought-power discovered horse-power, and used it.

"I have already admitted that the farmer has as much brains as the next fellow, which perhaps isn't admitting much—and that it is not because of the *lack* of brains that he is so intellectually deficient. Being a bit of a phrenologist I can see some of you have and I know from experiences of my own that young fellows reared in the country come to regard their chances of improving themselves as quite hopeless, because they have been denied a high-class education—a university training—and by their retiring, bashful sort of disposition, they stand aside when the coxcomb or man of airs from the city comes along and give him, because of his superior looks, all the talk and all the road-way to himself. And the chances are, maybe, that the man from the city

hasn't half the countrymen's brains, but having the confidence to assert what little he has or hasn't, he annexes and carries off the prize. Metaphorically speaking, your young man of the country is leg-roped—intellectually chained up—and is dragging and lagging along like a dingo, a thousand years behind the times. To raise him from his mental lethargy requires more social intercourse—a wider knowledge of the world he lives in, and a closer acquaintance with the works of the master minds that have advanced civilisation, and shaped the destinies of nations. In fact, he has to be hatched and brought *right out of his shell*. In the vegetating state in which he exists to-day, he is lolloping along in absolute ignorance of the golden opportunities and possibilities that are his very own, if he only knew how to make use of them—which he doesn't. It is to the glorious open air life of the country, and not to the dim, dirty alleys and attics and back-yards of the congested cities, that Australia must look for the production of public and literary men fit to rank with the great intellects of other lands. She is centuries behind them to-day, and when the average man of the country, by his own research and study, comes to realise that there is no Shakespeare, no Milton, no Burns, no Johnson, no Locke, no Macaulay, no Adam Smith, no Fielding, no Charles Lamb, or no Dryden in Australia, and that the most eloquent political speakers he has in his country

to-day are mere pignies and potato pips when compared with such men as Pitt, Fox, Burke, Sheridan, Curran, Robert Emmet, and Gladstone of the old world, or Jefferson, Lincoln, Daniel Webster, Wendel Phillips, or Washington of America—when he comes to realise these things, I say, he will value the treasures that are hidden away between the covers of thousands of volumes that adorn the shelves of our Schools of Arts; he will then devote less of his leisure hours to discussing the colour of his cows and the quality of butter and milk cans; he will live in a more intellectual atmosphere at home, and when a candidate for political honours comes along, and asks him to believe that his country and his lands are in danger of being raided and annexed by a tribe of New Guinea savages, as one did the other day, he will vote for that politician with bricks and empty gin-cases and cow-hide.

“I repeat, that it is from the country, from men like yourselves, that Australia must look for men to shape her destinies. There is no atmosphere so inspiring to thought and reflection as that of the country. On the shaft of a dray, on the seat of a mowing machine, or between the handles of a plough a man might shape a successful play, or an epic poem, or he may solve a great political or industrial problem. And on this point I will quote a passage from an article written by Washington Irving. He



ON THE SHAFT OF A DRAY.

said: 'To this mingling of cultivated and rustic society may also be attributed the rural feeling that runs through British Literature; the frequent illustrations from rural life, those incomparable descriptions of nature which abound in the British poets that have continued down from "The Flower and the Leaf" of Chaucer, and have brought into our homes the freshness and the fragrance of the dewy landscape. The pastoral writers of other countries appear as if they had paid nature an occasional visit and become acquainted with her general charms, but the British poets have lived and revelled with her—they have wooed her in her most secret haunts—they have watched her minutest caprices. A spray could not tremble in the breeze—a leaf could not rustle to the ground—a diamond drop could not patter in the stream—a fragrance could not hail from the humble violet, nor a daisy unfold its crimson fints to the morning but it has been noticed by these impassioned and delicate observers and wrought up into some beautiful morality.

"What the brain is capable of doing then, I say, is never fully revealed until it is put to the test, and no man knows what he can do, or what he can't do, until he tries. There is no doubt in my mind that some of us are born with better brains than others; some are endowed, perhaps, with greater natural gifts, but every brain that isn't made of

cheese or jelly or greenhide is capable of being improved and expanded. Like soil it will grow weeds and Bathurst-burr until it is cultivated, and profitable seed planted in it. And like soil again, it will raise weeds and Bathurst-burr after it *has* been cultivated, if neglected long enough. And that to be able to express his thoughts intelligibly and forcibly a man must necessarily be a born writer, or orator, is absolute bosh. *Ambition* and *work* are the secrets of the success of it every time. First cultivate the art of thinking, and the rest must follow with more or less success—mostly less, no doubt. Because a man is not naturally a gabbler it does not follow that, given a set of competent ideas, he will not be able to clothe them in suitable and attractive language. Just you try it. I think it was Johnson—not the one down the road who runs your pub—who so wisely said: 'The common fluency of speech in many men and most women is owing to a scarcity of matter and scarcity of words; for whoever is a master of language, and has a mind full of ideas, will be apt, in speaking, to hesitate upon the choice of both; whereas common speakers have only one set of ideas and one set of words always ready at the mouth. So people come faster out of church when it is almost empty than when a crowd is jostling at the door.'

"And now, gentlemen, I come to what seems to my humble understanding to be the saddest and most lamentable

aspect of the defects and deficiencies in the life of the farmer as he lives to-day. It is a delicate matter to touch on, perhaps, but it is of such vital importance to a nation such as Australia promises to be, that I wouldn't be doing my duty if I shirked it, or attempted to talk round it. My remarks on the matter, of course, are not intended to be personal. Don't misunderstand me for a moment. It is always etiquette that on occasions such as this present company should be excepted; but were you all sitting outside on the fence, instead of round this room, I dare say I might strain a point to include the lot of you! As I promised before to say again: the farmer's one and *only* aspiration in life is to accumulate coin, and become wealthy and fat and to leave those dependent upon him even wealthier and fatter than himself. The only goal he is making for, on this side the grave, is the goal of the money-grub. And he is quite conscious of his aspiration, too; but he is utterly unconscious of the fact that it is *only* aspiration. The farmer doesn't realise the pride of place he should hold in the community, not a bit of him. His importance to Australia he hasn't yet started out to think about. He doesn't know who he is, or who he ought to be, even. And the priceless heritage which is his in the shape of picked, landed possessions in a young and enormously wealthy country, with unlimited resources undeveloped, such

as Australia is, and with the future—barring an invasion—that lies before her, he doesn't appreciate, because he hasn't awakened to the fact that he holds such a heritage. It doesn't even stand out as a *dim* circumstance to him yet. If it did, he would surely begin to take some pride in such a treasure. He would begin to pay more respect to the surface of things. He would spend a little time and money and taste in setting it off with touches of art and ornamentation. He would, surely, with advantage to himself and Australia, begin to hold his head a bit higher; and to differentiate between the proprietor of the farm and the man who is employed to milk the cow. A visitor from foreign lands, coming to Australia, I venture to say, would not be able, unless accompanied by a guide, to walk on to any one farm out of a hundred in Queensland and say which was the man who signed the cheques, and which the man getting his ten bob a week for milking the cow. It would be impossible for him to do so, because there is no external difference—no line drawn. And I do not say it out of disrespect for the man of wages. I mean it in a broad and *national* sense. In his eager, nervous haste to make, and hoard money, the farmer loses all sight of the fact that it is necessary he should lend a little tone to his position. To do so is *business*; and instead of masquerading in false garbs the way he does—in the garbs of the ten bob a week man—

if his possessions and himself were, to a modest extent, adorned with the symbols of position and prosperity, what a pattern he would become for others, and what a magnificent advertisement he would be to his country!

“To bring about such a state of things, however, it would be necessary to convince the farmer, that intellectual achievements are, after all, much more honoured, and more to be coveted than a purse bulging with boodle! And it is high time that some of the leisure moments, at least, on every farm, were devoted to acquiring its own little library, and the minds of the children directed to pursuits other than the everlasting cow-and-calf order, and disorder of things. Those children are inevitably destined to become wealthy, and let farmers see to it lest their offspring may, one day, find themselves humiliated like the Duke of Bedford, when he protested against a pension being granted to Edmund Burke. And when Burke replied: ‘It would not be gross adulation, but uncivil irony, to say that His Grace has any public merit of his own to keep alive the idea of the services by which his vast landed pensions were obtained. *My* merits, whatever they are, are original and personal; *his* are derivative. It is his ancestor, the original pensioner, that has laid up this inexhaustible fund of merit which makes His Grace so very delicate and exceptionous about the merits of all other grantees of the Crown.’”

The book-man, puffing and perspiring, resumed his seat amidst silence. A restless, uneasy, uncertain feeling seemed to possess the audience.

Duncan seemed to understand the feeling. He leaned over and whispered into the ear of the lecturer:

“By crikey! I dinna like the look o’ them. Their eyes are glaring and rolling like wild cattle’s. Ye’ve stirred their bluid. Tak’ that glass i’ ye’re haun’ to mak’ it believe ye’re gaun for a drink an’ go out that door near by an’ run like the vera deil till ye reach my place, or they’ll rend ye soul an’ body.”

The lecturer took up the glass and went out. And Duncan to hold the audience in check, jumped to his feet and, waving a volume of *Pickwick Papers* about, said:

“Well, now, I’m blawed if I ken mysel’ what a farmer wants wi’ a’ this readin’ that Meester Jones hae talked about. I’ve got a beggarin’ book here that someone gi’ed my wife. Four or five bloomin’ people tried to read it before I had a go at it. One o’ them got as far as that, page 10”—(displaying a corner turned down)—“another got up to that, page 14. Another had enough when he got to page 20”—(displaying another “dog’s ear”)—“and I mysel’ stuck to it like th’ deil till I reached page 51, which was a lot further than any o’ th’ ithers got; an’ I’ll stake my



"RUN LIKE THE VERA DEIL."

bloomin' soul there's no man livin' or dead who'll get any further wi' it."

Then McGrundy jumped up and said: "Anyhow, I reckon this cove's quite right in everythink he said, and farmers don't read or think half what they ought to. I know that from meself."

Tom Ryan rose and said the same.

Duncan stared hard.

Bill Murray and Sam Thomas added their approval of the lecturer's sentiments. The whole gathering, in fact, agreed with him, and began to express wonder at his long absence.

"Crikey!" Duncan drawled in explanation, "I thoct by the glint i' ye're een that a' you chaps were sair offendit at what he eensinuated an' I advised him tae sneak oot an' slither hame."



CHAPTER IV.

Trouble at McLeod's

AS time went on Duncan McClure prospered and became a power in the land—that is, in the land round Narralane. His honesty of purpose, his broad human sympathies and even his Scotch hardheadedness, commended him to the worthy folks who dwelt in his community. No doubt he was a bit of a rough diamond, and more than one shady customer had cause to remember that he was not a man to be trifled with; but, on the other hand, no one in trouble or distress had ever appealed to Duncan in vain. Having fought an uphill fight himself and by sheer grit reached a point of comparative opulence, he was always willing to lend a helping hand to the man or woman struggling against odds.

That was why the poor parson had found a friend in Duncan McClure. The keen, observant Scotchman had watched this "labourer in the vineyard" for a long time, had noted and admired his indomitable pluck, notwithstanding the poor yield of his harvest, and, in his own bluff and hearty manner, had become his friend.

Not only the poor parson himself but Mrs. McCulloh, his wife, had reason to look upon McClure as the friend in need who is a friend indeed, and no farm in the district showed the minister's family more hearty hospitality than "Loch Ness."

And the poor parson needed all the help he could get from such as Duncan, for his work was hard and often thankless. Long journeys in blazing heat or driving rain, by day or by night, visiting the sick, comforting the afflicted, or mayhap assisting at a wedding or a christening. If any of his parishioners were in trouble he was expected to visit them and say the word in season or endeavour to help them with a bit of good advice. For, as often as not, the "trouble" was more mundane than spiritual and the parson was frequently the means of tiding things over or showing a way out. Apart from sudden calls it was the poor parson's custom to visit the outlying portion of his parish at stated times, making a round that would take him away from home for days at a time, and on these solitary journeys he often had food for reflection.

On this occasion he set out to make Archie McLennan's place at the out-station gate before night, intending to start back to Narralane the following day. And as he jogged leisurely along beneath a canopy of the clearest blue the sleepy native bears, as he passed beneath them, lifted their woolly

heads and peered down from their places in the forks of the towering trees. And now and again a weary, homeless traveller with a heavy swag on his back saluted him respectfully and inquired the time of day and the number of miles to the nearest water.

"Lord God," the minister would murmur as he measured the magnitude of the great solitary bush at a glance, "open the eyes of the rulers of our nation to the wealth that is hidden away here, that they may direct the steps of Thy people to this land."

And every fresh valley with limpid streams winding through it; and every towering belt of flawless timber, every undulating piece of plain land that his eye rested on, the same prayer unconsciously left his lips with increased fervour, till at last, about noon, he came in sight of Neil McLeod's weird and humble habitation. It consisted for the most part of 160 acres of dense scrub, with here and there large holes cut in it to make room for the cultivation paddock and the house and yards. From a primitive point of view the holding was a picture—a grand work of art. Imposing walls of mountains were banked all round it, amongst whose silent gorges travellers were sometimes doomed to lose their way, and where men in the D.T.'s used to wander from Shanahan's shanty on the new railway, and strip themselves of their clothes and run from tree to tree

concealing themselves, and calling out, "They're coming! They're coming!" Ah, yes! there was a lot of grim humour lurking about McLeod's lonely selection. There was a large family, too, of the McLeods, consisting of several strapping sons growing into manhood, and a number of robust, kindly-natured, fair-skinned girls. And as the poor parson approached the habitation, he saw them all grouped outside, with gloomy, downcast expressions on their faces, watching two men rounding up the few head of milking cows which formed the nucleus of the prospective dairy herd that they had for many years dreamed of raising—and the family's hope and main-spring of support—and putting them in the yard to check the brands.

The work of the day was all suspended, and none of the family seemed to have heart enough to do another hand's turn about the place. The poor parson greeted them all cheerfully, and in turn they responded with a forced sickly effort at pleasantry. The girls hung their heads, and the boys pulled their slouch hats down over their eyes when taking charge of the horse after the minister had alighted from it.

"I hope no serious trouble has come to any of you, Mr. McLeod," the minister said, noticing the gloom that was upon the tanned faces of all. Mrs. McLeod, with big tears in her kind, motherly eyes, looked at her husband and waited

for him to speak. McLeod hesitated, and the girls moved quietly away and went inside the house.

"Well, yes, Mr. McCulloch," the father, with a futile effort to treat his misfortunes lightly, said; "we have a bit of a bother to-day—we're losing all the cows, as a matter of fact—and the horses, too!"

The poor parson didn't seem to understand, and stared wonderingly from Mr. McLeod to the cows as they trooped into the yard.

"The storekeeper has sent the bailiff for them," Mrs. McLeod said; then covered her face with her apron and sobbed into it.

The poor parson understood, and spoke softly and sympathisingly.

"Of course I would have paid the money," McLeod said; "but when a man hasn't got it, what can he do, Mr. McCulloch?" and he lowered his head and scratched the ground thoughtfully with the toe of his boot.

"I am very sorry," the poor parson replied. "I can understand how hard and disheartening it must be to all of you. I feel it keenly myself, and how much heavier the misfortune must weigh on you. But don't forget it could be worse, Mr. McLeod," he added, "much worse—and you should thank God your trouble is only a financial one, which might be retrieved in many ways, and that it is not a serious

illness or the death of a member of your family. For, after all, the loss of one's worldly possessions is but a minor matter in our lives."

"Ah, yes!" Mrs. McLeod answered. "Look at the poor widow woman, how she was taken away only the other night! And I'm sure that poor girl and boy would much sooner have lost every stick they had, and gone begging all their lives, than anything should have happened to their poor mother."

The reference to the death of Mrs. Braddon was too painful for the poor parson, and he remained silent.

"Yes," McLeod said slowly; "when you look at it that way we're a good lot better off than we think."

The girls called to their mother to invite Mr. McCulloch in for a cup of tea. And the bailiff, having finished checking the brands of the stock, rode across to have a final word with the boys, who were sitting on the ground with their backs to the barn, brooding over the situation together.

"I could only see *three* horses," the bailiff said, referring to his note book, and reading out the descriptions of the animals.

"There should be *five*," Jimmy, the eldest boy, said.

"I'm telling you I could only see *three*," the bailiff repeated.

"Well, there was *five*," Jimmy insisted in an antago-

nistic tone, "and I can show them to you," and he rose to his feet.

"Well, I always thought a wink was as good as a nod to a blind horse," the officer said; "but I'm beginning to think a man wants to carry a blackboard about with him in these parts. I'm telling you again that I could only see *three of them.*"

Jimmy gradually began to understand the ways of a humane bailiff, and with an intelligent look on his face drawled:

"Oh! I see—yairs, o' course."

Then the bailiff said "Good-day," and rode off.

The poor parson, instead of holding prayers, asked for pencil and paper, and went carefully into the position of McLeod's affairs with him, and showed how it was still possible to get sufficient credit from a bank to enable him to buy more cows and make a fresh start. And when he went away in company with Jimmy, who was to show him a short cut through the ranges to MacLennan's place, the McLeods brightened up and became hopeful and light-hearted again.

CHAPTER V.

A Bush Tragedy Averted.

EIGHT miles it was through the ranges to MacLennan's, and from there the poor parson intended making back to Narralane the following day.

"There was somewhat of an unpleasant incident the last occasion on which I called at Mr. MacLennan's place," the minister remarked thoughtfully as the hut came in sight, "arising out of an extraordinary misunderstanding."

Jimmy smiled, and said, "Yairs, we heerd about it."

The minister looked quickly and concernedly at Jimmy, and asked:

"Was it spoken of?"

"Oh, yairs—a lot o' times."

"In what light was it spoken of?" with deeper concern.

Jimmy looked puzzled.

"Oh! just when any o' them met, you know—day-time I think, mostly."

"I mean, what was the view they took of the incident—what was their account of it?"

Jimmy smiled again. Then drawled bashfully, "Well" (pausing), "they reckoned you" (another pause)—"perhaps it wouldn't be right to tell you."

The poor parson bit his lip, and a troubled, anxious look came into his face, and he stared at the hut which they were now drawing close to.

"Archie is not at home just now, though," Jimmy said, in a consoling sort of way.

"Is he not?" with a look of fresh concern from the minister.

"No—he's been away for months, at the Burnett gettin' sheep for the station."

"And does Mrs. MacLennan stay all alone?" the minister asked.

"One o' me sisters was stayin' with her for a while, but she's home again now, and me mother, I think, is comin' over to-morrow or the day after, to stay with her for a month."

They passed through the station gate, and an aged cattle-dog came whimpering to meet them. The animal sprang up at the heads of the horses, and clawed the trouser leg of the poor parson; then rushed back to the hut, and stood whining and wagging its tail at the half-open door.

Jimmy, who understood the language of dogs better than he did that of bailiffs, said apprehensively:

"There's something up here; that dog wouldn't go on like that if there wasn't." And he sprang actively out of the saddle, and stepped on to the verandah.

The dog disappeared inside, and rushed into the bedroom.

Jimmy knocked on the half-open door, and called out. There was no reply. He called again.

The dog answered with a loud hollow bark from the bedroom.

"There's something wrong right enough," Jimmy, with a nervous tremour in his voice, said to the minister; then boldly entered the house.

The minister, with a look of alarm on his face, followed.

Mrs. MacLennan lay in bed; and through the open bedroom door they saw the dog standing looking up into her face.

"Anything the matter, Mrs. MacLennan?" Jimmy asked.

No answer.

"My God!" Jimmy gasped. "I believe she's dead!"

The dog bounded on to the bed, and stood whimpering over his mistress.

"My God!" Jimmy gasped again, as they both entered the bedroom and scanned the face of the woman. "She is dead!"

THE DOG BOUNDED ON TO THE BED.

Duncan McClure

Looking at



The poor parson, pale and trembling, lifted the hand that lay stiff and cold on top of the blanket.

"Lord God! have mercy!" he exclaimed, reeling back and putting his hands to his head.

For a while Jimmy stared hopelessly at his companion; then murmured: "What on earth can we do?"

"Lord God!" the poor parson muttered.

There was a terrible silence.

"I think we ought to see if there's been foul play," Jimmy said, and leaned over the dead woman. "No!" he exclaimed. "I think" (pausing and watching the woman's face closely), "I think she's still alive."

The minister lifted the limp hand again, and felt the pulse long and anxiously. "There is yet life," he said. "Go you, friend, and tell your people. I will remain and watch over our sister."

"It'll be terrible for you to do that," Jimmy answered feelingly, "for it will be all night, nearly, before anyone can arrive."

"It *will* be terrible—duty is often terrible. But go; do not delay—and the Lord guide you in safety."

"*My heavens!*" Jimmy murmured as he swung into the saddle. "In there all night alone!" and his hair rose on end at the very thoughts of the awful situation, as he galloped through the darkening timber.

The minister set to and made a fire, and searched the shelves of the humpy for whatever home remedies they contained, and applied them to the patient. Then hour after hour went slowly by. The night birds called gloomily to each other. At one moment they whooped funereally and with the doleful regularity of a bell tolling for the dead. At another they filled the air with screams, that sounded like the cries of lost souls in pain. Every now and again a dingo would "Coo-ee" mournfully, and, when the echo had died slowly away, another would answer back. And the dawn was almost breaking when the first cart, containing McLeod and Mrs. McLeod, rattled over the loose stones, and passed through the gate.

Catching the sound of the minister's voice within, McLeod, as he stepped on to the rough, boarded verandah, placed his hand on his wife's arm, and they both paused and listened.

In deep, solemn tones came the words: "*Our Father, who art in heaven: Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation: but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*"

The Stewarts later entered the house.

"Thank heaven!" the minister murmured, and, spreading his arms on the rude table at which he was sitting, rested his head on them.

Mrs. Stewart took charge of the patient, and administered a little brandy to her, and an hour or so after, and just when the doctor arrived, there were sure signs of recovery. By the afternoon she opened her eyes, and murmured things to those about her.

And, later in the day, as the poor parson returned slowly towards Narralane, he was met by a bearded tan-faced drover, leading a pack-horse and riding along at a swinging pace. The horseman steadied his speed when approaching, and respectfully moved his hat. But the minister didn't remember Archie MacLennan, and they both passed on.



CHAPTER VI.

A Fresh Misfortune.

A FRESH misfortune was upon the Narralane congregation. A storm had swept over the country and carried away the church. And it was the only building in the district that it *had* carried away—not even a barn, or the frailest old bark humpy in the district had been affected by that hurricane.

“I canna understan’ it at a’,” Duncan McClure said, gazing in solemn wonder upon the sacred ruins of the fallen edifice.

“Nor me,” Bailey, the storekeeper, sighed, shaking his head perplexedly.

Neither could the poor parson. He stood and stared dejectedly at the catastrophe in silent amazement.

“Well, m-m-m-man proposes,” Bill Eaglefoot said, closing his eyes and shaking his head spasmodically, “but the Lul-Lul-Lul-L-Lord disposes.”

For the moment Bailey seemed to entertain doubts as to the reverence of Bill’s observation, and closely watched to see how it would be regarded by the parson.

"Yes, friend," the parson said, bestowing a soft look of approval on the ragged, useless-looking reprobate.

"You never said a truer word in your life, then," Bailey promptly said, patronisingly, to Bill, "if it isn't the only true word that ever y' did say," and he turned his eyes on the others assembled round the débris, like mourners at a grave, and chuckled ignorantly.

Bill, who, upon being complimented by the poor parson, felt like walking on air, now suddenly took umbrage.

"I suppose y-y-you think," he snapped, stepping off the end of the damaged pulpit, upon which he had been standing with both feet, and looking Bailey, the elder of the church, right between the two eyes, "that that's m-m-my own ph'losophy?"

"I didn't know it was philosophy, Bill," Bailey replied, grinning at the others again.

"No, o' course y-y-y-you didn't," Bill sneered, mounting the end of the broken pulpit again. "An' I don't s-s-s-suppose you ever heard o' Bub-Bub-Bub-acon, did you?"

"Bacon!" Bailey chuckled; "I've eaten plenty of it," and laughed at his own greasy joke, until the others, to Bill's discomfiture, joined in the merriment.

Bill shuffled his feet nervously, and bit his lip, and scowled.

"Hae ye ever heard o' Robbie Burns?" Duncan

McClure asked, stepping forward and fixing his twinkling grey eyes on Bill in a defiant sort of way.

The parson smiled amusedly at Duncan.

"I dinna mean you, pairrson," Duncan put in quickly, as though anticipating the minister meant to assist Eagle-foot by disclosing the identity of the Scottish poet. "I'm askin' Bill the question, seein' he seems to ken sic a deil o' a lot."

Then, turning to Bill again, "Hae ye ever heard o' Robbie Burns?" And Duncan glared as though he had Bill in a tight place.

The others grinned in favour of Duncan.

Bill, in sheer disgust, turned his face away, and looked across the landscape.

"I kenned he hadna," Duncan concluded triumphantly. Then, placing his heavy foot on Bill's instep to attract his attention again, said: "Hae ye ever heard this before?" And, in a broad, sing-song voice, he proceeded to recite:

"O, ken ye hoo Meg o' the Mill was mairrit?

O, ken ye hoo Meg o' the Mill was mairrit?

The priest he was oxter'd, the——"

Duncan paused and tried to think, but couldn't remember any more.

There was a loud laugh. The poor parson smiled at

Duncan and walked away, and Duncan mopped his brow laboriously and looked triumphantly at Bill.

"Look here," Bill said, turning on Duncan, "that th-th-ing was old a hundred years before Bub-Bub-Bub-urns was bub-bub-orn." And he stepped off the battered pulpit and went away.

"Puir Bill," Duncan said, rejoining the minister, "his skull's a wee bit crackit, pairrson."

But the rebuilding of the church was all that was on the parson's mind. He invited those around him to the shade of a tree, and placed the serious aspect of the situation before them. After consulting for an hour they decided to hold service one night during the week at "Loch Ness," and, at the conclusion of it, the church committee would meet and "do something."

The sun was down, and the shades of evening were stealing silently over the great Bushland. At "Loch Ness" the last can of milk was emptied at the dairy; the cows were sauntering in twos and threes from the yard; the plough horses, still wet with sweat, ravenously feeding from the nose-bags; while across in the mountain hollow the jack-asses were laughing in mocking refrain at the departing day.

"The boys reckon they can see the auld pairrson comin' roond the corner o' the paddock, but I'm hanged if I can,

Vi!" Duncan McClure said, as he reached the kitchen and proceeded to wash his face and large, brown arms in a capacious tin dish of water that stood on a wooden bench beside the door.

Mrs. McClure hurried into the front room, which had been reserved for the holding of the service, to see that everything was in order and to put the cards away. Then she returned to the kitchen and started laying the table.

"I suppose we'll have to tak' supper in the kitchen th' night, Vi," Duncan went on, squeezing water from his whiskers and rubbing his face hard with a coarse towel.

Mrs. McClure hoped the minister "wouldn't mind."

"Be th' hokey, he'll have to like it, Vi!" came from Duncan in loud good-natured tones. "He's no a bit better than the rest o' us."

"Ye shouldna speak so disrespectfou, Duncan," Mrs. McClure said, flying about.

"Besides the meenister should receive more consideration than common folk."

"I don't think that, Vi," Duncan called at the top of his voice. "And if I was an auld pairrson mysel', I don't think I'd——"

"Good evening, Mr. McClure," came, in soft, silky tones, from the edge of the kitchen verandah.

Duncan looked round.

"By joves!" he shouted delightedly. "I'm beggared, it's Mr. McCulloch himsel'! We were jist talkin' about ye, pairrson; and hoo are y' gettin' along?"

The poor parson smiled and said he was getting along very well. Then he mounted the verandah and shook hands with Duncan and with Mrs. McClure, who came from the kitchen with her homely-looking face radiant with smiles.

"What hae ye done wi' your horse?" Duncan inquired, seeing the minister had appeared without the quadruped.

"Your man took charge of him at the yard gate for me," the other replied.

Duncan looked surprised.

"Auld Bill, was it?" he asked out of curiosity.

The parson smiled, and said it was.

"Weel, weel," Duncan drawled. "Fancy that, Vil! The auld sinner! I didna think he had sae much intelligence."

The parson spoke up for Bill, and paid him several compliments upon his usefulness as a groom.

"He's comin' to the service the nicht, pairrson," Duncan said in a hushed voice and with an amused look in his face.

The parson was pleased to hear of Bill's good resolution, and related an instance that he knew of respecting a

hardened criminal who had been reclaimed by the church and lived a good Christian life ever after.

“Well, that’s what he’s been tellin’ the boys, pairrson,” Duncan drawled. “But I think, mesel’, the auld deil ’ll sneak oot o’t as soon as he gets a skinfou o’ grub.”

Then he lifted the tin dish he had sluiced himself in, and, turning round, heaved the water over the verandah, just as Bill, in search of his supper, hobbled round the corner.

“Gosh, man!” Duncan exclaimed, apologetically, on seeing the contents of the dish go over Bill and wash his hat off.

Bill threw up both hands and gasped for breath.

“Oh, dear!” the parson muttered pityingly, turning his eyes on Bill.

“I didna see y’ comin’, man.” Duncan chuckled amusedly at the drenched reprobate. “I didna.”

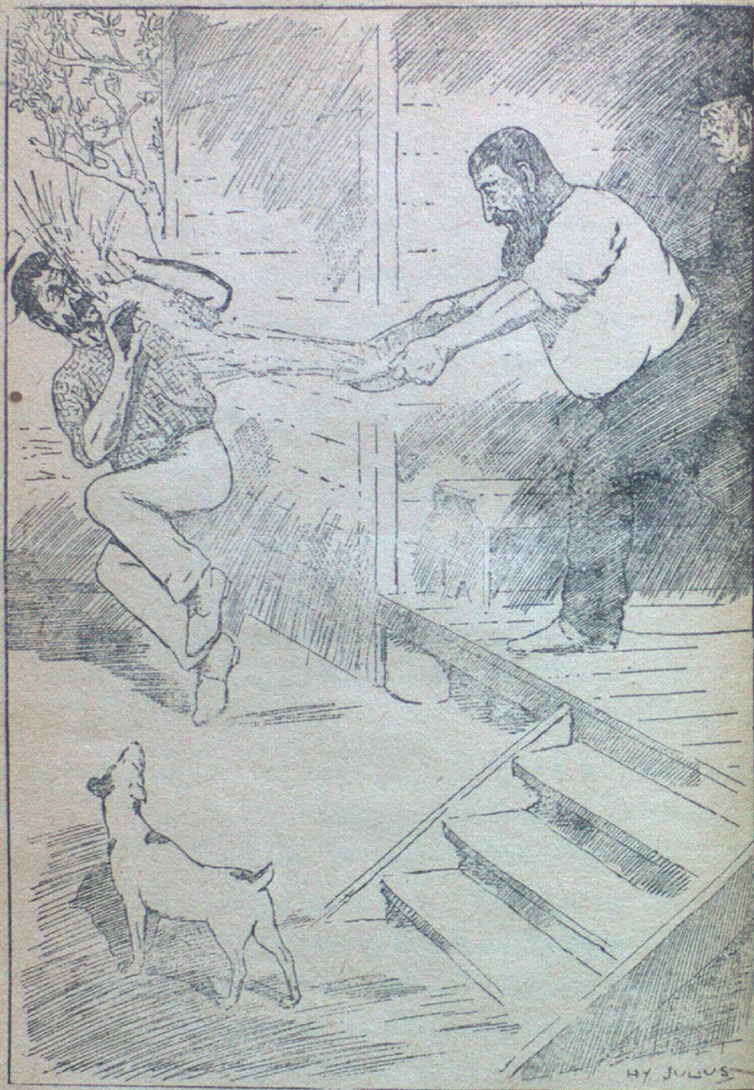
“Well, y’ mighter taken th’ soap out of it!” Bill stammered in injured tones, as he rubbed his eyes.

Duncan’s features instantly relaxed.

“Oh-h!” he said, leaning over the edge of the verandah, and peering concernedly at the ground about Eagle-foot’s feet, where the lump of yellow soap lay. “Han’ it back, han’ it back, man!”

Bill shook the water off himself like a dog, and stooped

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BILL THREW UP BOTH HANDS AND GASPED FOR BREATH.
Duncan McClure

and handed Duncan back the soap. Duncan replaced it in the dish, then turned to the parson.

"I was gaun tae ask ye, when a' that happened, if ye would care to hae a wash yoursel', pairrson?"

The parson had remembered the day had been excessively hot, and thought he would.

"Wait a wee till I fill the dish for ye." And Duncan tripped off to the tank, and returned with the dish brimming over.

Mrs. McClure protested.

"Why could ye no tak' Mr. McCulloch into the bedroom to wash himself, Duncan?" she said.

The parson smilingly assured Mrs. McClure that he would sooner wash in the tin dish, and, removing his coat, carefully rolled up his limp and soiled shirt cuffs.

"An' it's a lot better, pairrson," Duncan said, with an air of assurance; "for ye canna wash a' the dirt aff yoursel' in a bedroom."

The minister lifted the soap and began his ablutions with a graceful action.

"Stan' away back frae it, pairrson," Duncan said, "and poke your heid richt under; it'll cool ye after a' the heat."

Mrs. McClure scowled at her voluble husband, to silence

him; then she suggested that he proceed with the carving while the others were getting ready.

"A' richt, Vi!" Duncan answered boisterously, taking his place at the head of the kitchen table, and proceeding to slash into the round of corned beef which had just been lifted steaming hot from the pot; and, when he had filled every available plate, called out loud enough to be heard at the barn: "Ye'd better come noo, all o' ye, an' tak' your seats afore the grub gets cauld."

Bill Eaglefoot was first to respond. Bill always believed in promptitude at meal-time.

"Hello, Bill," Duncan said, with a good-humoured grin; "had ye tae change your shirt?"

"No!" Bill growled. "But I w-w-ould have if I h-h-had another to p-p-p-put on." And, squeezing himself into a seat behind the large family teapot, he commenced his meal right away.

"Come along, Mr. McCulloch," Mrs. McClure called out, and the minister entered, and was given a seat on Duncan's right hand. Then came the young McClures and the two ploughmen, who hesitated at the door and looked nervous in the presence of the Church.

Duncan turned to the minister:

"Eh, mon!" he exclaimed in admiration, "but it's

made a great change in ye, pairrson," and the minister smiled feebly.

"Duncan!" Mrs. McClure said, speaking from the bottom of the table. "Ye shouldna pass remarks."

The rest of the company smiled, and stole sly glances at the minister.

"But there's a difference, richt eneuf," Duncan insisted stubbornly. "An' do ye no feel it yersel', pairrson?" he asked, appealing to the minister.

"Did ever ye hear sic a man?" Mrs. McClure said to Bill, who was sitting handy to her at the table.

But Duncan wasn't to be interrupted.

"These hot days, ye ken," he continued, by way of explanation, "a man perspires a deil o' a lot, an' the dust a' gets on ye, and after ye hae a wash and get it a' aff, ye feel like anither fella—ye dae, don't ye?" and he looked at one of the ploughmen for confirmation. But the ploughman had no wish to be drawn into conversation at the table, and only grinned and looked away.

Duncan, after a pause, turned to the minister again.

"But I don't suppose *ye* sweat very much, dae ye, pairrson?"

"Duncan! Duncan!" Mrs. McClure cried again, and Eaglefoot, in the act of putting a potato into his mouth,

changed his mind, and, dropping his fork, broke into a low, audible chuckle. The others followed his example.

Duncan put down the carver. "Ask a blessin', pairr-son," he said in solemn tones.

The minister bowed his head and said:

"For what we are about to receive the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen."

Old Bill, who had been eating all through the piece, looked from one to the other with a half-shamed expression on his face.

Mrs. McClure, noticing his discomfiture, leaned over the corner of the table and whispered, "It doesna matter." And Bill took fresh courage and began the meal all over again.

It was a quiet, uneventful repast. No one but Duncan and the parson conversed, and as the others finished they rose and shoved their seats back against the wall, and sat there stiff-backed, telling each other in turn that it had been a lot hotter that day than the day before.

An hour later the dogs started barking, and the sound of voices and the tramping of horses were heard in the yard.

"They're beginning to come," someone said, and Bill and the ploughmen, glad of an excuse, rose and went out.

"Well, I suppose we had better licht up the kirk," Duncan said to Mrs. McClure, then went off to the sitting-

room, where some chairs and the side-boards and tail-boards of drays, resting on gin-cases, awaited the congregation.

After Bailey and some more of the elders supervised matters, and readjusted the seats, and Mrs. McClure had explored the kitchen for an extra candle or two, the minister entered and took his seat behind a little table which served as a pulpit. Then the weird, heavily-booted congregation trooped into the dimly-lighted room, and, taking their seats nervously, sat staring expectantly at their pastor.

Duncan McClure gazed all round the room, and turned and looked to see who was sitting behind him, then leaned across to his son Peter, and whispered:

"I dinna see that auld deil, Bill."

Peter smiled and shook his head sceptically. Peter was a non-believer where Bill was concerned.

"Gang oot, Peter," Duncan whispered again, "and ask him in."

Peter rose and went out. But Bill was not about. Bill was on his way to Charley Jorgens's place, on the parson's horse. Charley Jorgens was a particular friend of Bill's, and owned a horse and dray with which he used to make a living collecting dead bones and things that other people didn't take any interest in. And sometimes he collected things that other people took a lot of interest in.

Peter returned, and, taking his seat again, shook his head in the negative.

"The leein' auld deil!" Duncan whispered in condemnation of Bill; then turned his attention to the parson.

The poor parson was not an eloquent preacher, but he was earnest and impressive, and his words held the congregation in rapt attention. They all sat motionless, their eyes rivetted solemnly to the floor, listening intently.

The parson proceeded to outline the steps and stages of a criminal's life. On the left-hand wall of the room he pointed in an imaginary way to the infant in its mother's arms, and, in touching tones, said, "Innocence." On the right he pointed to the criminal in chains, and exclaimed, "Guilt." Tears came from the women's eyes, and the men exhibited restlessness.

The parson, in emphasis, struck the open Bible that lay before him on the improvised pulpit, and a nest of startled cockroaches, glossy-backed, well-fed and full-whiskered, unexpectedly fell from the table. The vermin raced across the floor; but, when Mary Archibald gave a start and moved her skirts, they wheeled in irregular order, and scampered towards Duncan McClure. Duncan, who hadn't noticed them at first, suddenly opened his eyes and moved his foot. the cockroaches turned again and raced back under cover

of the table, where they remained together, shouldering each other about and blinking at the audience.

The congregation grinned, and Bill Andrews nudged Tom Smith. Tom Smith struggled to retain his composure. Mary McBrown raised her eyes meaningly to her mother, and they both turned red, and took out their handkerchiefs and coughed into them. When they coughed, the cockroaches started nervously, and seemed inclined to scatter, but took courage and settled down again, and blinked more and more at the congregation.

Willie Smith nudged old Macfarlane; old Macfarlane turned his head slowly, and, scowling at Willie, whispered hoarsely, "Hae some sense."

The congregation seemed to lose interest in the sermon altogether; their minds were all on the cockroaches. Presently the parson thumped the table again, and added a new interest to the proceedings.

The "Jack of Hearts," and the "King of Clubs," and the "Ace of Spades," and the "Queen of Diamonds," followed by a number of "rags," dropped out of some part of it and fell on the backs of the unsuspecting vermin.

All but one scattered suddenly. The one remained concealed under the "Ace of Spades" and the "Queen of Diamonds."

"O-o-h!" Mary McBrown whimpered, involuntarily.

as some of the vermin arrived hurriedly at her feet. Her mother pinched her to silence her; then they both made a choking noise and smothered their mirth. But Bill Thompson, from the opposite side of the room, laughed outright, and, rising clumsily, made for the door.

The parson paused for a moment and stared at Bill; then continued his sermon without remark.

The congregation settled down, and were becoming absorbed again in the minister's words, when the "Ace of Hearts" and the "Queen of Diamonds," balanced across each other, began to show signs of animation, and moved slowly across the floor towards Mrs. McClure.

The congregation lost its solemnity altogether, and made a noise like geese. The parson stopped abruptly, and eyed them warningly.

Duncan McClure glared at them and shook his head, then chuckled himself.

The poor parson, with a dark look on his face, gave out the next hymn—and saved the situation.

The congregation made a great noise finding the place in their hymn books, and, rising hurriedly, sang and laughed in the same key.

The service ended; and Duncan McClure apologised to the minister for the unseemly merriment of the congregation. Then the Church Committee took possession of the



THE CONGREGATION LOST ITS SOLEMNITY ALTOGETHER.

room. On McClure's suggestion, they decided to rebuild the church with their own labour, and to put the first nail in it the following morning. Then they shook hands with the parson and with one another, and went home.

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Next morning the committee met at the appointed hour, each burdened with some portion or other of a carpenter's kit. But they didn't make a start on the church. There was no church to start on. It had all disappeared in the night.

And when Duncan McClure returned home, he found Bill Eaglefoot had disappeared, too.

Bill was helping Charley Jorgens to build a new house.



CHAPTER VII.

Bailey and the Morrows.

THE Morrows were poor North of Ireland people, and lived on a selection at the Grass Tree.

The selection was poor, too, and the Morrows had lived on it for five-and-twenty years. Altogether they had ten children, nine of whom were boys—the other was a girl. A kind, good-hearted girl, too, was Dulcie Morrow. She was also pleasant and good-looking—so good-looking that everyone used to draw comparisons between her and old Morrow. No one was able to see any resemblance—no one except old Tom Hanihan, who was so blind that when he rode out to look for his cows, he had to take one of his boys behind him on the saddle to see them for him.

The house the Morrows lived in was a four-roomed one covered with bark, and walled in with bark, and the spouting that was round it, and which reached within a couple of feet of the hole in the water-cask, was made of bark, too; and the verandah flooring was all bark; and the outside fireplace, where cooking could never be done, was built of bark, except one side of it, which was a bag; and the old dog

that always slept about the place, and never took any notice of strangers, was called Bark. There was also a capacious barn made of bark, nearly always empty; and finally, there were a couple of horses and a few head of cattle on the selection, and a mortgage—not made of bark. And that was about all the Morrows possessed, except a good deal of faith and hope, and it was the hope that kept them happy.

The scant meal of stringy salt beef and dry bread and boiled pumpkin was over, and it was night at Morrow's selection.

Inside, Dulcie lay dressed on her bed in the skillion room, burning a smellsome, old, slush lamp, and by the dim light of it pouring over the tattered pages of a copy of "Fair Girls and Grey Horses"—a copy given her one day by a passing drover in exchange for a billy of hot water. On the rude sofa in the front room, two of the youngest boys, tired out after a day in the paddock cutting dead cornstalks, lay coiled up, one at each end.

Outside, the old couple sat on the verandah in silent, gloomy contemplation. There was scarcely a sound, save the tramp, tramp, of one of the old horses as it moved wearily about cropping the couch grass in the yard. Owls flew round silently; the stars came out in clusters, and blinked and blinked. To the west, the faintest flicker of

a fire located MacPherson's place some two miles off, under the brow of a ridge. To the east, a silvery streak appeared in the sky, and broadened and broadened till the great round moon blazed up over the tree tops; and the fences took shape, and the big, dead trees in the lane stood out like ghosts, extending their shadowy arms to feel their way through the dimness.

Then Mrs. Morrow spoke:

"Poor Danny," she said, sorrowfully; "he tells me in his letter they have only had a fortnit's work between them since they went away in June, and they've no money yet to send. And Jimmy, he lost his horse swimmin' a crick, and he thinks they'll be coming home again if they dersent soon fall into something."

"Well, they can do no good here," her husband growled; "there's nothing here for anyone; and if they can't soon send something to give the storekeeper, I am sure I don't know what is going to happen," and he rose and walked up and down the verandah. "There will be no corn," he went on, "not a baly cob!" Then, breaking off, he stopped short in front of his wife, and, leaning down and looking into her face, hissed savagely, "And has that girl made up her mind yet? Is Duleie going to take Bailey's son while she has the chance, and do something to lift us all out of this infernal life, or is she still thinking of that young

Dawson, who hasn't a hair on his lip nor a shirt to his back any more than she has herself? Now, I want to know what she's going to do, for Bailey will be here to-night for settlement of his bill."

"The girl is as determined as yourself, John," his wife replied; "and, whatever else she might do, I am afraid she won't marry Willie Bailey, no matter how rich his father means to make him. And no one can blame her, perhaps; for what girl would like to be tied to a man who's a cripple and half an idiot?"

"Well, *I* want her to be," Morrow thundered; "and mightn't she as well be tied to him as anyone else?"

"May be—but 'tis for herself to say, I think," the woman answered.

"It's for *me*," from Morrow, angrily.

Dulcie, who had left her room, and was standing listening at the door, sighed anxiously, and bit her lip resolutely.

"Oh, very well, very well; I don't wish to interfere," and Mrs. Morrow remained silent and stared out into the moonlight.

A horseman rode in through the open slip-rails, and a voice called out, "Are you at home, Morrow?"

"Hello! Hello!" Morrow cheerfully answered, stepping off the verandah; "it's Mr. Bailey."

Then both he and Mrs. Morrow welcomed the visitor

warmly, and invited him inside, where Mrs. Morrow apologised for the poorness of the furniture.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Bailey said lightly. "Wait till your husband makes his fortune, Mrs. Morrow, and you'll be able to stock your house with everything of the best."

"Yes, when he does, but——"

"Or," Bailey interrupted, "when your daughter marries that son of mine."

"That's more like it," Morrow put in; but Mrs. Morrow dropped her eyes on the table, and played thoughtfully with some bread-crumbs that were scattered there.

"But I forgot to ask you how Dulcie is," Bailey went on, noticing the girl was not present.

Morrow said she was "fine," and Mrs. Morrow called for her daughter to come and see Mr. Bailey.

But there was no response from Dulcie.

Mrs. Morrow rose and went to her daughter's room. The slush lamp was still burning in its place, but Dulcie was not there.

The mother went to the back door, and called out several times without receiving an answer. Then she returned to the front room with an anxious look on her face.

"Go on with you; she *must* be about," Morrow growled irritably, and, rising, went outside and bellowed

"*Dulcie!*" in a variety of keys, and loud enough to be heard on the other side of the range. Yet there was no answer.

Then a search, in which Bailey took part, was started inside and outside the house; but twelve o'clock came, and no trace had been discovered of *Dulcie*.

"Devilish strange!" Bailey murmured, mounting his horse and riding away.

"John," Mrs. McCulloch said, from under the bed-clothes, "I hear someone knocking."

The poor parson woke out of a deep sleep, and, sitting up in bed, listened.

He heard a voice, which seemed to be in distress, call him by name.

"There's someone, Jean," he said. "Whoever can it be at such an hour, for it's near morning!" And, getting out of bed he partially dressed himself and went to the door.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed, when the light of the lamp he held in his hand revealed the face of *Dulcie Morrow*. "Whatever is amiss, *Dulcie!*"

Dulcie burst into tears, and between her broken sobs said, "Oh, Mr. McCulloch, I'm in trouble! I've run away from father, and—and—and I want you and Mrs. McCulloch to help me."

"Dear me! dear me! Come inside, my poor girl!"

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"WHATEVER IS AMISS, DULCIE?"

the minister said, taking her by the arm, "and sit down and calm yourself; then tell me what is the matter."

Dulcie, her hat all askew, and her skirts full of grass seed and wet with dew, sat down, and, in a fresh burst of tears, lost control of herself.

"Poor girl!" the minister murmured, hurrying back to his bed-room to acquaint his wife. But Mrs. McCulloch, who was in Dulcie's confidence, had recognised the girl's voice, and was already throwing a wrapper over herself.

"Whatever has happened, Dulcie?" she asked anxiously, entering the sitting-room.

"Bailey ca-ca-came," Dulcie sobbed, "to our pl-pl-place, and fa-fa-father was again going to try and mak-mak-make me marry Wi-Wi-Willie Bailey, and I—I ran away."

"And you did right to come to us, Dulcie," Mrs. McCulloch said, sitting beside the weeping girl and putting her arms about her. "The brutes!" she went on. "And I'm sorry to think ill of your father; but Bailey was always a bad man."

"I cannot understand such conduct!" the poor parson said, indignantly; "and it shall not be carried further—it shall not!"

"Poor girl!" Mrs. McCulloch added, caressing Dulcie; "and you've come all these miles alone this night!"

"Have no further fear," from the minister; "just comfort yourself, and I will protect you."

Turning to his wife, "And, maybe, Jean, it would be well if we made a fire and prepared her a cup of tea."

Dulcie struggled to speak, but was too overcome.

"Poor dear," Mrs. McCulloch murmured, removing the unhappy girl's hat for her and gently smoothing her hair; "don't mind them; just quiet yourself while I get the tea."

But Jessie, who had been awakened and overheard all, came dressed from her room, and said kindly:

"No, Mrs. McCulloch, you stay with Dulcie, and I'll get the tea."

And when Dulcie had taken the tea, and was calm again, Jessie in a sisterly way took charge of her, and before dawn had broken they were both comfortably in bed, receiving each other's confidences and weeping softly in each other's arms.

Next morning the minister sent a message to Duncan McClure, and that afternoon Duncan arrived at the manse.

"Bailey was always a scoundrel," he said, angrily, when the poor parson explained Dulcie's situation to him; "an' shouldna be an elder o' anything. The villain! to try an' force yon half-witted cripple o' a son o' his upon a guid lassie like Dulcie, because he happened to haud her faither in his grip—an' against her will, too, pairrson. Th' crawlin'

bleckguard! Why, I wouldna perméet Black Luzzie to be mated wi' sic a misfit body—'twould deteriorate posterity, so it would. Why, the man must ha' th' vera deil in him to think o' sic a diabolical ae'. An' I've a mind tae gang to his hoose this vera meenit an' charge him wi' it a'."

But Duncan was suddenly saved the journey by the unexpected appearance of Bailey at the garden gate of the manse.

The poor parson, as Bailey calmly closed the gate and approached the door, whispered to his wife and the two girls "not to say anything," and warned Duncan, who squared his shoulders and fixed his eyes on Bailey, "not to lose his temper."

"Well, Bailey," Duncan said, before the other had time to speak; "for twa pins I would greet ye wi' heavin' ye oot ower yon palin's, a reception that should a' been gien to the first deil, wha entered the garden o' Eden."

"Hello! it's *you*, McClure," Bailey said, affecting indifference. "Is Mr. McCulloch about?"

"He *is* about," Duncan answered, stepping aside to allow some of the poor parson to be seen. "An' so is Mrs McCulloch, and so is Jessie Braddon, and so is Dulcie Morrow, Bailey!"

"Oh, *she's* here," Bailey said, feigning to look pleased, and addressing the minister; "that's just what I've come

about. Her father and mother and everyone over our way have been hunting high and low for her."

"Bailey!" Duncan burst out, "ye're a leecin' skunk!"

The poor parson held up his hands disapprovingly, and interrupted Duncan.

"Look here, McClure," Bailey began calmly, his eyes flashing slightly despite his assumed indifference.

"Look here, Bailey," Duncan interrupted boisterously, "for peersecutin' a puir, innocent, guid lassie by squeezin' her debt-ridden faither to force him tae mak' her consaint tae a union wi' your cripple, crack-brain o' a son, I——"

"McClure! McClure! be silent!" the poor parson cried, placing his hand on Duncan's arm to restrain him.

"By ——, I'll make you prove this!" Bailey shouted, suddenly losing his temper.

"Eh, that *will* I, then," Duncan snarled naively, gently brushing the minister to one side. "An' dae ye wish to be confronted wi' the complainant hersel', Mister Bailey?" And Duncan looked over his shoulder at Dulcie, who was standing resolutely between her two friends.

"By heavens! I'll make you prove this, McClure!"

"Will ye be confronted wi' the lassie hersel'?" and Duncan shoved his big, hairy face close to Bailey's.

"I'll make you prove all this," Bailey said again, and turned and hurried out of the gate.



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DUNCAN SHOVED HIS BIG HARRY FACE CLOSE TO BAILEY'S.
Duncan McClure

"He's nae in a hurry tae hae it proved, I'm thinkin'," Duncan said, turning to the others, whose faces wore looks of relief. "Being sic a cur, o' course he wouldna!"

Then the minister and Duncan settled down on the verandah to calmly diseuss Dulcie's position.

"I'll go wi' ye," Duncan said, "tae see John Morrow. I canna understan' John. He is not at a' a bad man, pairrson, but wi' his cares an' losses his mind must hae become distrackit."

So, accompanied by McClure, the minister set out right away for Morrow's place at the Grass Tree.

It was drawing towards sunset when they arrived there, and, as they approached the slip-rails, Bailey unexpectedly passed out through them.

"Hello, Bailey!" Duncan called to him. "We would baith be vera pleased by ye're remainin' a wee, to hear what we hae come to say."

But Bailey was in a sullen mood, and rode on without making answer.

Morrow, with a downcast look on his face, came from the house, and was followed by his wife.

"Hullo, Mrs. Morrow!" Duncan shouted cheerfully. "Hae ye had ye're tea yet?"

Then, after alighting and giving his hand to Morrow, "John, we've heard a' about this business wi' Bailey, an'

th' meenister's come ower o' purpose tae gie ye a deil o' a talkin' to."

Mrs. Morrow began to cry.

"I'm not going to deny it," Morrow said bitterly, addressing the poor parson. ("I knew he wouldna," put in Duncan.) "But why I wanted to act as I did I'm dashed if I can tell you—there!" and he hung his head in remorseful silence.

"I suppose it was a' because o' th' crawler pressin' for settlement o' his bill?" Duncan suggested.

"I suppose it must have been," Morrow mumbled sorrowfully.

"Eh, an' there was never any call for it, John," McClure went on; "for ye were never the kin' o' man that I wouldna mesel' hae rendered assistance tae, an' I tell ye noo that it horrified me when I heard tell o' how ye wanted to marry a guid lassie like Dulcie to that cripple o' a Bailey in preference to Danny Dawson."

Here Mrs. Morrow sobbed loudly.

"Why, man," Duncan continued, forgetting it was the poor parson who had come to do the talking, "ye ought tae ha' been prood to get sic an honest, hard-workin' lad as Danny Dawson tae tak' her. I wouldna gie him for a' the men that ever worked at 'Loch Ness,' an' I'd be prood mysel' for him tae ask me for ony o' my dochters."

‘Don’t say any more, McClure,’ Morrow mumbled; “I’ve heard enough, and whatever I’ve got Bailey can take.”

“He’ll tak’ naethin’ frae ye, John; I’ve eneuf confidence in ye to gi’ my han’ on that,” and Duncan extended his big, hard hand to Morrow, who took it in silence.

Then the poor parson, in Dulcie’s interests, spoke kindly and advisedly to the Morrows, and, having promised that Mrs. McCulloch would drive the girl home in the trap the next day, he and Duncan took leave of them and started home.



CHAPTER VIII.

The Poor Parson Takes an Outing.

BREAKFAST was just over when Duncan McClure, dressed in his best suit, drove up to the door of the Manse in his trap.

"It's a lovely morning, Mr. McClure," Mrs. McCulloch said, greeting him from the verandah.

"Aye," Duncan answered, touching his hat; "it's a braw mornin' after a' th' dour days we've had."

The minister, recognising Duncan's boisterous voice, came to the door with a smile on his face, and a roll of manuscript in his hand.

"I've ca'ed to tak' ye oot o' yer den for the day, pairrson, an' gie ye an airin'," Duncan said.

"For all the day?" the minister answered thoughtfully.

"Aye, for a' th' day, till the sale is ower."

The minister didn't seem to know anything about a sale.

"The big lan' auction. A' th' Grass-Tree estate is to be sell't in sma' blocks th' day," Duncan explained, "an' I'm thinkin' o' biddin' for a bit for Peter if it doesna rin

intae too high a feegur. Sae get ye ready, an' come alang. It'll dae ye guid."

"Well," the minister answered slowly, "it's very good of you." Then, turning to his wife, "But I have my sermon to prepare for next——"

"Heh, dang it!" Duncan interrupted, "what maitters the sermon for ance in a way, pairrson? Can you no gie them an auld ane? Deil a ane o' them would remember any o't. I wouldna mysel', vera often."

Mrs. McCulloch burst into a cheerful laugh, and, playfully touching her husband under the chin, said, "John, Mr. McClure has paid you a fine compliment."

Duncan, with a serious look on his face, stared wonderingly at her.

"I'm sorry if my sermons have so little effect as that, Mr. McClure," the poor parson said with a smile.

"Oh, dang it!" Duncan exclaimed; "I didna mean sic a dispairagement. The sermons, ye ken, nicht dae them a' a lot o' guid, an' mak' them think o' their sins like the vera deil, an' a' that, but they wouldna remember the exack words, ye ken."

The minister in a pacifying way assured Duncan that he "kenned" well no offence was meant, but Mrs. McCulloch still continued to enjoy the situation, and Duncan added gravely, "Oh, I wouldna, pairrson, I wouldna."

Then the minister, looking at his wife, again said:

"Maybe I could afford the day, Jean?" And Jean, feeling sure he could, urged him to join Duncan and take the full benefit of the outing.

"There'll be a deuce o' a big crowd there," Duncan put in enthusiastically, "and you ought to get maitter by it, pairrson, to write sairmons out o' for a' the year."

The minister smiled, and went off to his room to get ready.

"Why, I quite forgot to ask if you have had breakfast, Mr. McClure," Mrs. McCulloch said, apologetically.

Duncan's eyes twinkled like two stars, and a broad smile came over his face.

"Ma certie, I deed that!" he answered, "an' I've been lauchin' to mysel' aboot it ever since. I hed it at Bailey's. The auld rrascal yelled out to me when I was passin' his place, an' I got oot o' th' trap; an' if ye hed seen him at an ootside fire standin' ower a big pot makin' parritch, you'd ha' killed yoursel' wi' amusement."

"Making it himself?" Mrs. McCulloch asked in surprise.

"Yes, by the hokey! His family are away some place——"

"At Spring Bluff," Mrs. McCulloch answered, remembering having heard of their movements.

“Aye, that’s the plaice he tell’t me. Well” (Duncan’s eyes twinkled more), “he was standin’ ower this big black pot wi’ the fire blazin’ roond it like the deil, an’ stirrin’ the parritch wi’ a spirtle as lang as ye’re arm. ‘Are ye fond o’ burgoo, Mac?’ he’d say to me every meenit, an’ then he’d haud up the spirtle, wi’ the parritch drippin’ frae it like tar, an’ lick at it wi’ his rred tongue to tell if it was cooked eneugh——”

“Oh, Mr. McClure!” Mrs. McCulloch burst out, laughing, and put her hand over her face.

“It’s as true as gospel,” McClure went on, earnestly. “An’ then he’d pit the spirtle back into the pot an’ stir it a’ up again.”

Mrs. McCulloch shuddered.

“An’ when the breakfast was a’ rready on the table, an’ we baith sot doon alang wi’ the men, he askit me would I hae some burgoo.” (Duncan chuckled.) “‘It never agrees wi’ me,’ I tell’t him.” (Duncan paused.) “But, by jingo, Mrs. McCulloch, the men had a grreat appetite for it.”

Mrs. McCulloch gasped, “Oh!” and ran off inside, while Duncan, his fat sides shaking, sat chuckling cheerfully in the trap.

The minister, carrying a well-worn umbrella in his

hand, appeared, and, kissing his wife good-bye, climbed up and took a seat beside Duncan.

"He'll be a' richt wi' me," Duncan said, raising his hat to Mrs. McCulloch, "an' I'll see he doesna rin awa' wi' ony body."

Mrs. McCulloch smiled amusedly, and the trap creaking beneath its burden, rolled away.

It was a glorious morning; a clear sky was overhead, the air clear and crispy; birds were chirping and whistling in every tree, and the heavy dew on the broad fields of green, soft wheat, extending on either side of the road, glistened like jewels beneath the early sun.

"There's auld Bailey," Duncan said, recognising the form of the storekeeper on ahead. "He's puttin' doon a bore on that lan' o' his that he came by sae mysteriously, at Grass Tree, close by where they're haudin' the sale, an' he's gaun oot there the day. I'm hopin' he strikes brimstone instead o' watter, pairrson," and Duncan flicked the horse with the whip to urge the brute along.

"Has he gone down very deep with it?" the minister asked, ignoring Duncan's uncharitable wish towards a brother churchman.

"I'd be glad tae see him hauf as deep in debt, pairrson," and Duncan flicked the horse again.

The minister smiled, and, turning his head away,

noticed a cow standing on her head and her front legs inside Murtagh's wheat crop. Her hind legs were resting on the fence, twisted in the wires.

"Dear me, look at that!" he exclaimed, attracting Duncan's attention to the animal.

Duncan stopped the trap and stared at her. Then he turned his head and stared after Bailey.

"The indeependent auld hog, he seen her there, pairrson," he said, "'an' wouldna get doon tae dae a guid turn tae a neebour."

Then the two of them alighted and approached the cow. The cow seemed to take them for butchers, and struggled and moaned pitifully.

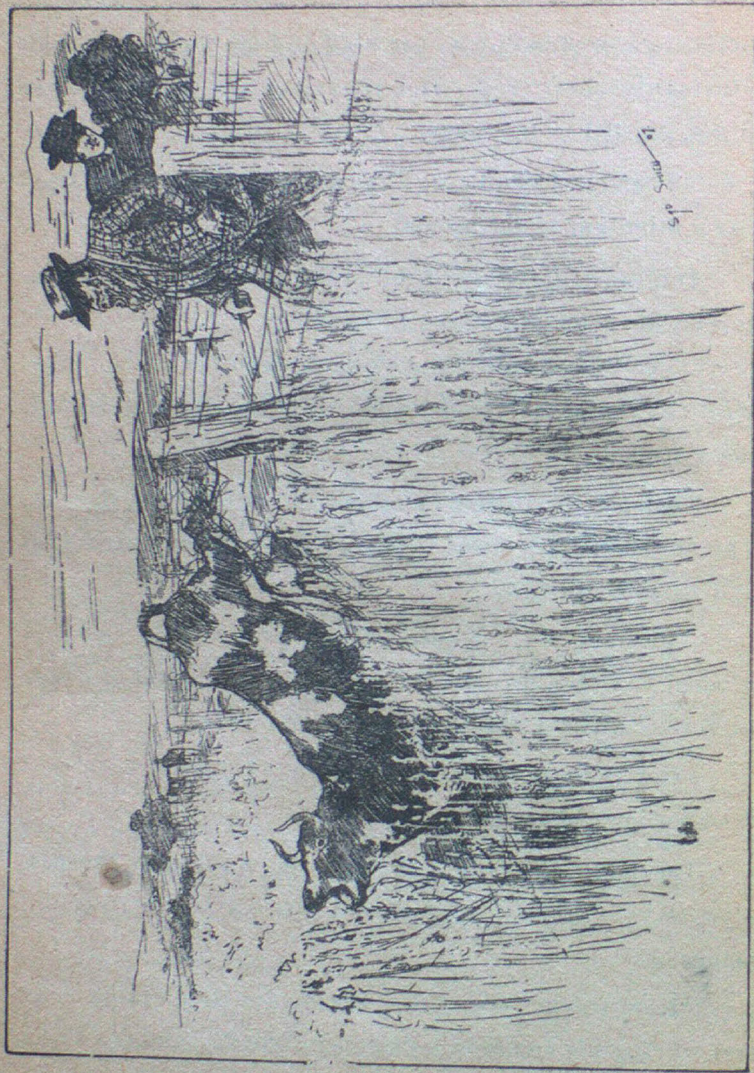
"Ye auld sod," Duncan said reproachfully; "sairves y' richt." Then he procured a short stick, the end of which he forced between the wires to ease the strain.

"Get ye ower the fence, pairrson," he called out, "'an' frichten her back a wee."

The minister crawled through the wires, and the cow blew streaks of froth at him and put out her tongue and bellowed.

"Poor thing!" the minister murmured, standing clear and waving his hands to induce her to back-pedal.

"Dinna be frichtent for her, pairrson," Duncan



HER HIND LEGS WERE RESTING ON THE FENCE.

shouted, working hard at the wires. "She canna hairm y'. Put yer haun' on her shooother an' shove her."

The minister made several half-hearted attempts to put his hand on her shoulder, but he didn't go as far as "shoving" her. The idea didn't seem to appeal to him, and for a moment or two he stood inactive, staring hopelessly at the struggling beast. All at once Duncan's plan succeeded, and with a rattling of the wire the animal's hind legs dropped to the ground. Then, as though the minister had been the cause of all the trouble, she bellowed angrily and rushed at him. The minister turned and ran along the fence. The cow pursued him.

"Dinna run frae her, pairrson!" Duncan yelled, but, on hearing a noise behind, he looked round and saw the horse running away with the trap.

"Whoa, Wallace!" he shouted, and chased the trap.

Duncan chased the trap for a quarter of a mile, calling out, "Whoa, Wallace" between breaths. And when he captured the runaway and returned, the minister was sitting on the road, pale and exhausted-looking, while the cow was calmly enjoying the young wheat.

"Did she pit her horns tae ye, pairrson?" Duncan asked anxiously.

The minister hadn't wind enough to reply. He dragged

feebly at the end of his coat, from which a large piece was missing.

"Ye shouldna ha' run, pairrson," Duncan said reprov-
ingly. "Ye should ha' stood yer grun' an' hit her a skelp
on the snoot."

Then he helped the minister into the trap again and
they drove on.



CHAPTER IX.

The Land Sale.

AS Duncan anticipated, a large crowd assembled at the sale. The ground was covered with traps and conveyances of all values and descriptions; while a hundred or more saddle-horses were fastened to trees, stumps, and the wheels of drays. Politicians, who had no other way of filling in their time, were there; a contingent of wealthy city men desirous of settling their sons on the best land were there; all the old hands of the district, who had only a few pounds to their name, were there, "just to see how things would go"; and their lanky sons, who had no money at all to their name, but wanted to make homes for themselves, were there also. The latter, for the most part, mooched about with plans of the estate in their hands, pointing out the best pieces of land to their parents. And the parents would pour over the plans and chew blades of grass, and gaze thoughtfully at the noisy auctioneer, and think of their banking accounts and wonder aloud "if they could manage it." They would keep on wondering until someone

from the city would bid three or four pounds an acre for some piece that they (the old hands) had in view; then they would gasp and turn their eyes on the man who ventured such figures, and regard him as a financial curiosity.

The day wore on, and the attendance grew larger and larger. Block after block was put up and eagerly bid for, and knocked down at prices ranging from three to seven pounds.

"It's gaun awfu' dear, pairrson," McClure said, shaking his head, as he waited for his turn to come. "Frightfu'!"

At last the auctioneer read out the descriptions of the piece McClure was anxious to secure for Peter, and Duncan nudged the minister and said, "This is th' piece I'm gaun tae hae a shot at," and the minister, who had been showing symptoms of weariness, suddenly became interested in the proceedings again.

"Ten shillin's!" Duncan called out cautiously.

"Ten shillings an acre I'm offered for this magnificent piece of dairy land. Ten shillings for one of the choicest blocks in the whole estate."

There was a lull; no one seemed to want that particular piece; and Duncan nudged the minister again, and said excitedly, "Bless me, if I dinna think I'll get it for that!"

Then:

"Fifteen shillings," came slowly from a husky voice, the owner of which was concealed in the thick of the crowd.

"Fifteen shillings I am offered. Any advance on fifteen shillings?"

"Gang roon' and keek wha's biddin' against me, pairrson, an' tell him I'll gie him ten poon, tae haud his tongue," Duncan said excitedly.

The minister stared in surprise at Duncan, and remained motionless.

"At fifteen shillings—it's going at fifteen *shillings!*"

"Seventeen and sax," hurriedly from Duncan.

"Seventeen and six—seventeen and six—any advance on seventeen and six?"

"Gang roon', pairrson, an' tell him!" Duncan fairly gasped to his reverend companion.

"I couldn't think of such a thing, McClure," the minister answered warmly.

"A poon'!" Duncan shouted, straining and stretching his neck to locate his opponent.

"Only one pound an acre I'm offered for a block worth all the rest of the estate put together," the auctioneer rattled on.

"One pound five," from Duncan's opponent.

At this stage John Jordan elbowed his way to Duncan, and said, "Do you know who's bidding against you?"

"I dinna," Duncan answered wildly.

"Any advance on one pound five? Don't all speak at once."

"Eaglefoot," John Jordan said in Duncan's ear.

"The ragged, dirty deil! Wha's puttin' him up to it?" Duncan exclaimed; then, in the same breath to the auctioneer:

"One poon' ten!"

"One pun' ten, I'm offered—one pun' ten—one pun' ten——"

"He's bidding for Bailey," Jordan whispered further, "and he'll take £50 to stand out."

"He'll nae get it, then; I'll mak' im pay for it," Duncan yelled.

"One pound twelve and six," from Eaglefoot.

"Three poonds!" in sharp, angry tones from Duncan.

"That's something like bidding, gentlemen," in encouraging tones from the auctioneer. "Three pounds I'm——"

"Three pounds ten," from Eaglefoot.

"Three——"

"Five poonds!" Duncan roared before the man with the hammer could repeat the former bid.

"Five pounds ten."

"Seven poonds," in determined tones from Duncan.

"Seven pounds ten."

"Eight poonds!" Duncan yelled savagely.

The minister touched Duncan on the shoulder and whispered advisedly to him not to lose his judgment.

"Haud yer tongue, pairrson!" Duncan howled, and the crowd laughed.

"Nine pounds," from Eaglefoot.

"Ten poon'," from Duncan, and the spectators surged round and urged him to victory.

"Ten pounds ten."

"Eleven poonds!" Duncan roared.

"Twelve pounds," was the quick response.

"Let him hae it," Duncan cried eagerly, "let him hae it; it's no worth twa." And he smiled triumphantly and rejoiced with the crowd.

"What's the man's name?" the auctioneer asked, fixing his eyes on Eaglefoot.

"For Mr. Bailey, I was biddin'," Bill answered nervously, and the roars of merriment that greeted the announcement were suddenly interrupted. Fresh commotion set in. Bailey himself, with all his whiskers and his eyebrows burnt off, and waving his hands about excitedly, rushed on the scene.

"We've struck fire at the bottom of the bore," he

shouted. "It might be a volcano, and the flame is burning high up in the air."

The crowd stared in wonder at Bailey, then in the direction of the bore, where some gas or oil that was struck had ignited, and seemed to become concerned about their personal safety. But the auctioneer, who feared the spoiling of the sale, boldly declared Bailey was mad, and ordered his men to take him away and tie him up. And his men cheerfully rushed Bailey, who made futile efforts to resist, and, catching sight of the poor parson, appealed to him in a pathetic voice. The minister made an attempt to protect the elder of his church, and in solemn tones demanded his release, saying it was "a wrong and unchristian proceeding."

Then Duncan McClure interposed:

"Dinna mind the auld rrascal, pairrson," he said; "he's no worth it. An' if he's no mad the noo, he will be when he kens a' he has to pay for the lan' he bocht the day."

And Duncan, taking the minister by the arm, led the way to the trap, and drove him safely back to the manse.

CHAPTER X.

McClure Drops in for a Crack.

JIMMY McTAGGART had just left the Manse when Duncan McClure unexpectedly put in an appearance. At sight of Duncan Mrs. McCulloch started to laugh—a laugh in which even the poor parson couldn't refrain from joining.

“What! you too, Mr. McClure! Surely not?” Mrs. McCulloch said, shaking hands merrily with the burly Scot.

Duncan smiled, and, looking mysteriously from one to the other, said:

“Well, I'm blamed if I can tell what ye're laughin' at.”

“Well,” Mrs. McCulloch answered, her kindly eyes dancing with merriment, “only about half an hour ago Mr. Anderson came to tell us that they were blessed with another young son; and he was no sooner gone than young Mr. McGregor ran in with tidings of a daughter. And” (laughing) “he had no sooner turned his back when” (choking with mirth) “Mr. McTaggart——”

"Wha-at!" Duncan roared hilariously. "Bless me, ye dinna tell me that Jeemie McTaggart——?"

"Yes, TWINS!" Mrs. McCulloch fairly shrieked.

"Losh!" Duncan shouted, and tumbling into a chair, dropped his head between his knees and rocked about joyously. "I wouldna hae thocht it o' McTaggart," he yelled, lifting his head again; "I didna think he was sae progressive."

The minister looked hard at Duncan; then he, too, laughed heartily.

"And when I saw you coming in the gate, Mr. McClure," Mrs. McCulloch went on, after recovering herself, "——"

"Wha-at!" Duncan burst out afresh, the joke suddenly dawning on him. "Did ye think I was anither?" and his head dropped again, while his sides shook more. "Losh me! nae sic thing! Ma auld wifie wouldna hae that noo. But, by jove!" (suddenly arresting his mirth, and gazing at the minister with a steady serious eye) "I tell ye what, pairrson. Ye ken yon bay mare o' mine—the yin that bolted wi' ye past the kirk?" (The minister remembered the animal well.) "Well, she's got a rrattlin' guid foal, jist a day auld."

The minister, who couldn't restrain himself, broke into another laugh, and Mrs. McCulloch ran away to the kitchen

A moment or two later, Jimmy McTaggart, out of breath, returned to know if Mrs. McCulloch could lend the nurse a little cornflour till theirs came from the store.

"Hullo, Jeemie McTaggart!" Duncan shouted cheerfully, wheeling his chair round to face the father of the twins, who remained standing at the door. "I believe ye've been daein' great things."

"*Twa*," McTaggart answered with a smile.

"It surprises me," Duncan went on seriously; "for I usetae tell the chaps that you wad dee a bairnless unhappy auld beggar."

"Well, yer see, yer never can tell," the other answered, with a short, triumphant chuckle.

"By hokey, ye canna, then," from Duncan, "an' it's awfu' queer hoo things turn oot sometimes. I wadna wonder noo if ye hae a bigger faimly than mysel'. Ye'll as likely as no hae triplets next time—by jove, ye micht!"

The minister looked hard at Duncan.

"*Twa's* whips," McTaggart answered concernedly.

"*Twa's* naething at a', mon," Duncan said. "They're nae muckle guid tae a chap on a fairm, an' they dinna mak' a hoose merry at a'. Look at a' that's runnin' about oor hame, an' ye wadna believe the deil o' a sum they save us spennin' in wages. Aye, an' if ye gang intil the hoose o' a nicht, ye canna hear yoursel' speak" (turning to the

minister). "They mak' grreat fun for theirsels, pairrson. Some nichts the beggars wreck a' the furniture scrappin' wi' ilk ither in their games and jackanape tricks, and they leave a' for their mither to redd-up. And when they're no haein' that kin' o' fun, pairrson, they get me in tae play the pipes, and they dance the Hielan' fling or the Scotch reels. But" (turning to McTaggart) "I think ye've started too late tae hae onything like that, Jeemie. Ye'll be a dour, crabby, auld beggar be the time yours hae a' grown up, and whenever any o' them'll mak' a bit o' a noise ye'll be yellin', 'Haud ye'r tongue,' and sweering like the deil, an' shakin' ye're crutch across the room at them a'."

McTaggart grinned at Duncan, and, receiving the corn-flour from Mrs. McCulloch, turned to leave.

"McTaggart!" Duncan shouted. "Ye hae nae tellt us wha the bairns are like. Are they like yoursel' or like the guid wife?"

"Well," McTaggart answered, turning back, "ut's hard to tell yet. Some say the boy's like me, and that the girl's like its mother."

"At that rrate, then," Duncan drawled, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, "the boy 'll be the ugly beggar o' the brace."

McTaggart was lost for a reply, and hesitated and looked sheepishly from Duncan to the minister.

"Ye ken ye're not vera pretty, Mac," Duncan added.

"Perhaps not," McTaggart answered, forcing a grin.

"But ye look a grreat lot better sin' ye started growin' a baird."

The minister couldn't help smiling at Duncan, and McTaggart, grinning another sickly grin, mumbled "Good-day" again and left.

"McTaggart doesna like tae be chaffed about his looks, pairrson," Duncan said to the minister. "He canna stan' it at a'; an' yet he's nae sic a bad-lookin' cove, but he's sae helpless to defend hissel'."

The minister smiled at his guest, and, by way of diversion, inquired how the corn crop was turning out.

"Well," Duncan answered thoughtfully, "I expect to get a few bags frae mine" (Duncan expected about three hundred bags altogether), "but auld Henning Henssler, I believe, pairrson, will mak' his bloomin' fortune this year."

"Indeed!" the minister said, becoming interested.

"Yes," Duncan went on, lifting his voice, "he will that." Then, after a pause:

"Hae ye ever been tae his place, pairrson?"

The minister had been there once.

"Did ever the auld chap tell ye," he asked, "how he

stopped young Bill Riley frae gaun after his big, fat dochter?"

The minister smiled and shook his head in the negative.

Duncan rose to his feet and, in the voice of the old German, said:

"'Look here,' I say me to dot shap, 'I wants no Irish mit Sherman, und if come you here some more to court mit mein daughter, I court you mit mein dorg.'"

The minister adjusted his spectacles, and stared through them at Duncan.

"'Dot shap he go away den,'" Duncan continued, throwing his arms about, "'und I not see him some more dill von efenin' he dinks I am away. 'Here,' I say, lettin' Bismarek from der shain, 'dake him.' Dot shap run like plazes, und Bismarek he dake him by der leg, und ven I come oop he hef him by der droat.'"

The minister shuddered.

"'He could speak noddings,'" Duncan rattled on; "'he could only yust kick; und ven I dake me dorg away, Riley run like der vind till I see him no more.'"

"'And did the dog tear the man's flesh?'" the minister asked in horrified tones.

"'Weel, that's what I asked the auld chap mysel', pairrison,'" Duncan drawled.

"'And how did he answer?'"

“ ‘Don’ you be a foolidge shild, mein friend; Bismarck he hef no deeth—he hef noding only a dongue,’ ” Duncan said, and roared laughing, while the minister smiled placidly, and thought of Henssler.

“But that’s no the same as auld Riley’s vairsion o’ it, pairrson,” Duncan said, recovering himself.

“Is it not?” from the minister, who began to show symptoms of weariness.

“Naething like it at a’, It’s a’thegither deeferent. The auld chap says that his son gied Henssler a deil o’ a hidin’; but he’s an awfu’ liar, pairrson—the greatest liar that ever was born. De ye ken what he tellt me aboot a watch he gat gien tae him once?”

The minister looked up wonderingly.

“He tellt me,” said Duncan, “that he dropped it in a crick in a deep place one Sawbath when he was goin’ tae the Grass Tree, an’ he couldna get it oot; and when he cam’ back the next Sawbath, he pinte oot the place to a black-fellow who was a great swimmer, an’ put saxpence in his palm. An’ the blackfellow made the deil’s ain dive, an’ cam’ up wi’ the watch in his mooth, an’ it was gaun to the correct time o’ day.”

“Going?” the minister said in tones of astonishment. “How could a watch go for a week?”

“I asked him that, tae, pairrson,” Duncan replied with

a smile, "an' he just closed his een an' said it *was an eight-day watch*."

The minister removed his spectacles and wiped them thoughtfully.

Mrs. McCulloch joined them.

"I quite forgot to ask after Mrs. McClure and the family," she said, addressing Duncan.

"Oh, they're a' brawly," Duncan drawled. "The lassies an' their mither, I think, are gaun up tae see auld McStirling the day. Ye ken, I suppose, that auld Jeemie is my wife's brither?"

"Oh, yes," Mrs. McCulloch answered. "And how is the old gentleman getting along?"

"Oh, he's a' richt agen noo—that is, as richt as ye cuid expeck o' him for his age; but of coorse he's done for. His ee-sicht's a' gane, an' he couldna see you or me if he was here in this room; an' I'm beggared if I believe the auld chap cuid see a soverreign if ye wus tae put it richt under his nose." And Duncan smiled pleasantly at his own humour.

"Poor old fellow!" Mrs. McCulloch said sympathisingly. "It is sad."

"By jove, it is that," Duncan answered. "It's a rreal serious thing. I wouldna like it tae happen tae me. I don't know what th' deuce I'd do wi' mysel' if I went blin'."

After a pause:

“An’ yet sometimes ye canna help lauchin’ like th’ vera deil at auld McStirling; he does sic a lot o’ comie things.”

Mrs. McCulloch stared thoughtfully at the floor.

“He used tae be a teegur tae worrk ance, ye ken, and” (laughing) “he thinks he is still. . . . He gets hisselt a hoe sometimes an’ staggers aboot the grass-paddock under it cuttin’ Bathurst burrs, an’ he never cares a rrap which side o’ the fence he cuts them on, an’ nine times oot o’ ten ye’ll see him wirin’ in like auld boots at the burr on Tam Smith’s land.”

“Well, well,” Mrs. McCulloch murmured sadly.

“But Tam never interferes wi’ him,” Duncan said, and Mrs. McCulloch was forced to smile.

“But Peter took him tae toon in the sulky ae day,” Duncan went on, “an’ gaun doon the main street, Peter got oot tae go intil a shop, and left the auld chap tae mind the horse. Peter was a bit o’ a while gettin’ what he was after, an’ the auld cove got tired o’ it, and thoct he’d do a walk roon, an’ got doon on tae the footpath. After a bit he thoct he’d get back again, and crawled up intil a sulky that wasna his, and sat in it like a bloomin’ king. He was sittin’ in it quite a guid while, when a couple of swell girls cam’ along wi’ a lot o’ pairreels, and just stared at him wi’ grreat astonishment. One o’ them at last asked him what

he was doin' up there, and tellt him it was her sulky, an' the auld chap yelled at her an' tellt her to go to the deil, an' said he'd give her in charge o' a constable."

Mrs. McCulloch smiled again.

"An' if Peter hadna come alang just in time, I believe the auld fule wad hae done it," Duncan concluded.

There was a long silence, during which the minister yawned.

"Well," Duncan said, rising and putting on his hat, "I've got to ca' roon' tae McIntyre's tae stick a pig for him, so I'd better be makin' ttracks," and off he strode.



CHAPTER XI.

Retribution.

A SECOND meeting of the church committee was to be held at McClure's place one evening shortly after the timber of the ruined edifice had disappeared, and Duncan, having finished his tea, was sitting in the cool of the verandah waiting the arrival of his brother members.

Bill Eaglefoot, whom Duncan was not waiting for, unexpectedly came along, and, with a weary, innocent expression on his face, asked if there "was anythink doin'."

"Ye sneaking, slithery houn'," Duncan said, "hae ye spent your wages o' sin a'ready?"

Bill pretended not to understand McClure's meaning.

"Has Jorgens nae paid ye for assistin' him tae selec' the timber for his new hoose?"

"Fer what noo 'ouse? What are yer talkin' about?" Bill answered sulkily.

"Why, th' hoose o' worship that the twa o' ye micht hae tae gang tae jile for stealin' afore vera lang," Duncan answered sternly.

Bill shuffled his feet, and displayed signs of restlessness.

"Well, *I* never stole it," he stammered.

"No, o' course ye didna, ye whimperin' auld skunk!" Duncan shouted. "Ye wouldna dae onything wrang—ye *couldna*; nor Jorgens, either—ye're sic a pair o' saints!"

Bill stared confusedly at his late employer.

"But listen tae me," McClure went on; "if a' the timber ye took awa' isna back in its place be the end o' the week, we'll hae ye baith put in jile; and instead o' Mr. Jorgens's new hoose bein' opened wi' prayer, as, nae doot, ye baith intended it should, it'll be opened wi' a polisman."

"Well, I can't help what Jorgens does," Bill groaned in self-defence.

"Of coorse ye canna," Duncan replied, "but ye could help him well eneuch to steal the kirk. And ye *did* steal it, ye auld sod, ye! An' if ye try to deny the fac' I'll strangle ye whaur ye stan'!" And Duncan rose and was approaching Bill in a threatening manner, when Mrs. McClure appeared and warned him not to lose his temper.

"Then I willna," he said, turning to his wife, "for I've lost eneugh a'ready ower sic a shivering sinner."

"Well, I'll be going over there to-night," Bill mumbled after a silence, "and I'll tell him what you've said about bringing it back."

"An' ye can tell him if he doesna I'll get the twa o' ye twenty year," Duncan answered, seating himself again.

For a while Bill stood and stared at Duncan, like one who had something on his mind and was afraid to unbosom himself. But McClure merely groaned and ignored Bill.

Bailey arrived, and, mounting the verandah, cast a contemptuous look on Bill, and said "Good-night" to Duncan.

"Ay, it's you, is it, Bailey?" Duncan drawled. "We didna expec' tae be honoured wi *your* presence at the meeting."

"Well, they invited me to come," Bailey replied, shortly.

"Aye, nae doot—nae doot," dreamily from Duncan, "but it's tactfu' sometimes to refuse inveetations."

"Why, what do you mean?" Bailey retorted warmly.

Eaglefoot deemed it a favourable moment to unburden himself, and, interrupting, said humbly to Duncan.

"Is there any chance at all of me getting a bit to eat at the kitchen before I go back, Mr. McClure?"

"Gang tae the deil, ye cadging crawler, and bring back the kirk, or I'll break ye're heid!" And Duncan jumped to his feet and started Bill hobbling down the steps like a dog with a tin on its tail.

Then, turning to Bailey, Duncan yelled:

"Whit dae I mean?"

"Yes," Bailey persisted, with unusual display of courage; "I want to know what you mean by always tryin' to disparage me the way you do."

"Weel, may be," Duncan answered, "it doesna occur tae yer virtuous mind that yer action in takin' the piano frae the pairrson when he was sair afflicted wi' trouble hasna been forgotten by the committee or the congregation."

"Do you reckon I took him down over his bloomin' old piano, then?" Bailey cried.

"I do, Bailey," Duncan answered quietly, "an' I'm certain ye reckon ye did yoursel'."

Bailey sneered contemptuously. Then said:

"Look here, McClure. I never took him down over it. He took ME down."

Duncan flew off the handle.

"If ye dinna apologise for that, Bailey," he roared, rising to his feet again, "I'll hurl ye on tae ye're heid!" And, yelling "Apologise!" Duncan took his brother elder by the coat collar.

"He did, McClure—I tell you he did!" Bailey gasped.

"Hae ye still the insolence tae repeat it, mon?" McClure roared, shaking Bailey like a rat.

Mrs. McClure interposed.

"Dinna ye interfere wi' me, wumman!" Duncan cried.

"The meeserable crawler has insulted the meenister behin' his baack!"

"It's true, Mrs. McClure—he *did* take me down," Bailey reiterated sullenly. "I gave him £20 for the piano, which he said was nearly new and cost him £60, and it's no good at all; it won't go——"

Duncan shook Bailey hard again, and yelled, "What!"

And Bailey gurgled:

"It won't play a tune, I tell yer; none of the keys 'll make a sound."

"Ye've been daein' something tae it!" Duncan roared suspiciously.

"I haven't—not a thing!" Bailey squeaked. "Why should I, when it's me own?"

"Ye've been pittin' ye're feet on tap o' it!" in indignant tones from Duncan.

"I haven't—no one has," from Bailey; "it went wrong itself."

"May be the mice have got intil it," Mrs. McClure suggested, as an explanation of the defection.

"Hae ye been lettin' the mice take leeberties wi' it?" Duncan howled, shaking Bailey some more.

"There may be one or two got into it," was the answer, "but they couldn't do it any harm. It was *never* any good,

I tell you; and if you don't believe me you can have it for five pounds."

Duncan released his hold of the storekeeper suddenly, and, peering into his pale perspiring face, said calmly:

"I can hae it for five pun'? Do ye mean it?"

"Of course I do," Bailey answered; "and you'll be a fool if you buy it."

"Wull ye tak' ma cheque the noo and gi' me a clean receipt for the piano?"

Bailey willingly said he would, and Duncan went off and procured his cheque-book and closed the bargain.

"Weel, now," Duncan said advisedly, putting the receipt in his pocket, "conseederin' the bit ill-feelin', I think it would be judicious if ye didna stay for the meeting. An' the morn I'll gang wi' the dray an' tak' deelevery o' the piano."

Bailey took Duncan's advice, and turned and left just as the minister and several of the committee entered the yard together.

The committee met in Duncan's sitting-room, and decided to take action to recover the stolen timber from Jorgens, and to canvass the district for fresh subscriptions to rebuild the church.

"I think, pairrson," Duncan suggested, "if you an'

mysel' were tae gang roon' personally we'd collec' quite a guid sum."

The minister fell in with Duncan's idea, and they arranged to start out together some afternoon.

Next morning Duncan turned up early at Bailey's with the dray, and Bailey cheerfully gave possession of the piano.

"Now, remember," he said warningly, "that I've told you what sort of thing it is. So don't say I've taken you in when you get home and look at it."

"I'll gie ye ma word on that, Bailey," Duncan answered confidently, securing the instrument with ropes to the guard irons of the dray. "An' I'll gie ye anither fiver for ye're honesty if it's only half sae bad as ye say it is."

Bailey sniggered, and Duncan, mounting the shaft of the dray, drove off with the piano.

When the instrument was lifted from the dray at Loch Ness and carried inside by Duncan and several of the men, Mrs. McClure and the girls collected eagerly about it, and admired it, and examined it all over. They ran their fingers in turn over the keyboard, but to their amazement only a note or two responded.

"It must be eaten inside by the mice," one of the girls

suggested, and started to explore the interior of the instrument.

When it was opened up, a township of excited mice and other vermin raced about the different compartments and made the machine jingle and vibrate. Some of the mice arrived at the keyboard, and hurried along it and somersaulted to the floor.

"Oot! Oot!" Duncan exclaimed, making clumsy, frantic efforts to stamp heavily on some of them as they scampered to the different corners of the house. "Whaur th' deil hae they been a' the time?" Then he peered curiously into the piano, and more mice, followed by a family of whiskered cockroaches, came to the top.

Duncan struck at them hard with his felt hat, and knocked a lot of dust out of it, and the girls squealed and pulled their skirts about them.

"The Loard only kens what mair it may contain!" and Duncan "keeked" cautiously into the piano again.

"Did ever ye see sic a thing?" he exclaimed on making a discovery. "Blow me, Vi, it's fu' o' hay!" And, inserting his arm, drew out a dusty accumulation of straw and dust and young unfledged mice.

The girls shrieked cheerfully, and made nasty reflections on Mrs. Bailey.

"And Loard!" Duncan cried, fishing out a collection

of rag, "here's a pocket o' one o' Bailey's auld pants—an' a deid moose in it!"

The females pulled ugly faces, and ordered their parent to throw the rubbish outside.

Duncan dropped it on the floor and said: "Haud ye till we see what mair there is." And he dipped into the receptacle again. And when he drew out a portion of another garment the girls shrieked and danced about the room.

"Mrs. Bailey's!" they gasped, and shrieked some more, as their parent, with a broad smile on his face, stood holding the prize up to view.

"It wouldna fit you, Vi," Duncan said to Mrs. McClure, who was a big, fat woman, and broke into a chuckle.

"Put it doon, mon, and dinna be a fule!" Mrs. McClure cried, brushing the tattered trophy from her husband's hands. And Duncan dropped the dismembered garment on the other rubbish and looked into the piano once more.

"That's a'," he said, withdrawing his hand.

Then, after a silence:

"Nae wonder it wouldna play for the auld skinflint," he remarked, closely inspecting the instrument when it had been cleared of all the rubbish and vermin. "A' the cords are gnawed in twa wi' the mice. The ends o' them are stickin' oot a' ower the place."

Mrs. McClure regarded the damage lightly, and was

sure it could be easily remedied at little cost. And one of the girls remembered that a piano expert was at that moment engaged at McGrogan's.

"Gang an' tell him, Hetty, that I hae a job for him," Duncan said; and Hetty poked her head into a bonnet and went straightway.

The expert returned with Hetty and set to work on the piano; and when he had put it in order, later in the day, and played a lot on it for his own amusement, he offered Duncan thirty pounds for it.

Duncan regarded him with a look of astonishment.

"Thairty pun'?" he said. "Why, mon, d' ye ken it cost a'maist a hunner afore it was landed i' the country?"

"I dare say," the expert said, looking closely at the instrument again; "but I'll give you that for it."

"Ye willna," Duncan replied firmly.

"Well, make it forty?" the other said.

"Nor *saxty*," Duncan snapped.

The expert turned and eyed the instrument some more.

"Do you play, Mr. McClure?" he asked curiously.

"No on sic things as that, but I can rrattle the pipes."

"The bag-pipes?" from the expert, with an amused smile creeping over his face.

"Aye," Duncan returned proudly. "Will I gie ye a blaw on them?" And, with the glitter of patriotism in

his eye, he went off, and returned with the pipes under his arm.

“Whaat was that ye wer’ playin’ the noo?” he said, striking an imposing attitude in the middle of the room, and adjusting the pipes, which suddenly became seized with musical spasms.

“Oh, this?” And the other struck a bar or two of “The Blue Bells of Scotland.”

“Aye, that’s it. Go ahead wi’ it, and I’ll pick ye up,” said Duncan.

The pianist smiled, and, squaring himself, began softly, looking over his shoulder the while. Then in a fusillade of musical fireworks Duncan followed, and attracted all the members of the household to the room. The expert swayed about over the keyboard for an interval, then with a loud burst of merriment bounded to his feet and stood near the door gazing in cheerfulness and wonder at Duncan. But Duncan, in his element, was solemn, and blew on—blew till he was fairly exhausted. Then he lowered the pipes and said: “Ye couldna keep time wi’ me.”

The expert cheerfully admitted he couldn’t; and, seeming to fear Duncan might inflict some more on him, seized his hat and went off, chuckling to himself all the way to the gate.

CHAPTER XII.

The Lord Loveth a Cheerful Giver.

WE'LL ca' on a' those under the range fairst, pairrson," Duncan said advisedly, when he and the minister were ready to set out to canvass the district. "They're the hardest tae squeeze a saxpence oot o', up that way, and we'll be feelin' fresh tae tackle the beggars, pairrson."

The minister nodded and smilingly joined Duncan.

A few miles along the road they met Jorgens with two horses in a dray, returning the first instalment of the stolen church. Duncan stopped him, and, with a twinkle in his eye, gazed up at the loading.

"Sae ye've thocht better o' it, Jorgens?" he said meaningly.

Jorgens looked ashamed, and, casting his eyes on the ground, mumbled:

"Well, I wouldn't have taken it only Eaglefoot told me yous wasn't going to use it any more."

"And that was the reason you went tae get it in the

nicht?" Duncan answered, with a knowing glance at the minister. Then added quickly: "It doesna matter, Jorgens; we're no going tae interfere wi' ye when ye're doing what's richt. But I've something here" (drawing the subscription list from his pocket) "which ye micht oblige the meenister and mysel' by writing ye're name on for a couple of guineas."

Jorgens didn't quite understand, and stared at the paper as though he suspected it were a summons.

Duncan explained.

"We want a sma' subscription frae y' to help rebuild the kirk."

"Oh!" Jorgens stammered. Then, after hesitating and thinking hard: "A subscription? But I don't go to church."

"Naw, ye dinna," Duncan said, "which isna a bad thing for the kirk, may be. But put ye're name doon, Jorgens, an' like as no ye'll dae ae gude turn i' ye're life-time that'll leeve after ye. An' it may be the means o' savin' ye frae gettin' a roastin' frae auld Nick."

"Well, if I was one who went to church——"

"If ye were," Duncan interrupted, "ye'd sneak oot o' gi'en, like mony o' them that dae gang. Here, noo, how much shall I put ye doon for, Jorgens?" And Duncan flourished a pencil.

Jorgens shuffled about, and mumbled, "Well, I couldn't give more than a guinea."

"Ah, well, we'll let ye aff wi' that." And Duncan dismounted and handed the pencil to Jorgens.

When Jorgens signed the list Duncan said:

"Do ye happen to hae the guinea on ye noo? If ye hae it'll get it aff ye're mind, and save trouble in collec'in'."

"I've got a QUID on me," was the reluctant answer; "but I haven't a guinea."

"That'll dae—that'll dae!" Duncan replied, holding out his hand for the money. "Ye can gie the shullin' another time."

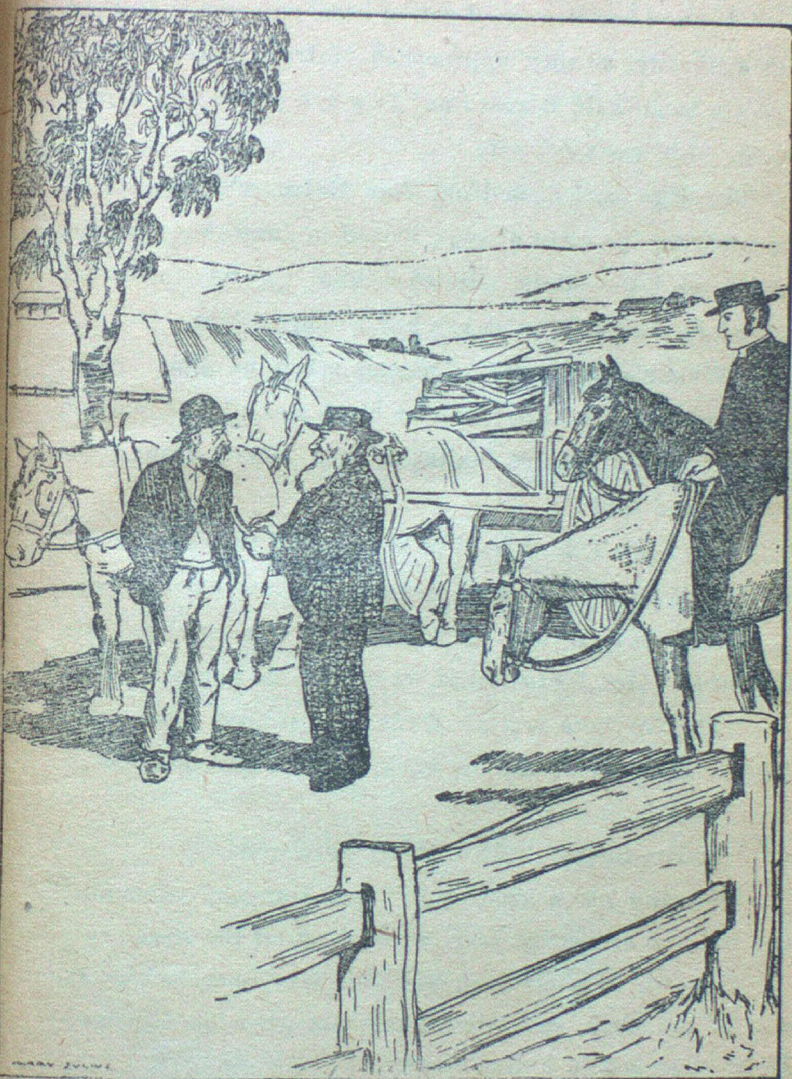
Jorgens slowly and laboriously extracted a greasy crinkled pound note from his trouser pocket and handed it over. Duncan took the money eagerly, and scratched "Paid £1" opposite the benefactor's name, and then mounted his horse and went on with the minister.

"If I hadna got it out o' him the day, pairrson," he remarked with a chuckle, "we wouldna hae seen it at a'. An' I'll wager y' he's whippin' the cat and kickin' himsel' ower it a'ready."

The minister said it would be a pity to take it from him if he was not willing to give.

"Pshaw!" Duncan said; "it doesna matter."

They rode together in silence.



"WELL, I COULDN'T GIVE MORE THAN A GUINEA."

"I dinna ken how we'll get on here, pairrson," Duncan said anxiously, as they approached McIre's place. "Auld Tam's a mean auld beggar; an' he's aye puttin' on a puir mooth. An' sae's his wife."

The dogs barked, and old Tom McIre, who was standing studying the ways of pigs, looked up, and, knowing the mission of the visitors, slipped behind the haystack—but not before Duncan's quick eye had rested on him.

"Whaur's the boss?" Duncan asked of Mrs. McIre, who came from the kitchen with a blush and a lot of flour on her face. Mrs. McIre hesitated, then looked around the horizon, and said:

"Oh, I don't think he'll be about at all this afternoon."

"Will he no?" Duncan grunted, looking hard at her.

"And how is Mrs. McClure and the children, Mr. McClure?" Mrs. McIre asked, changing the subject.

"They're vera weel," Duncan answered absent-mindedly. Then eyeing the haystack, which was a new one:

"Wha built yon?"

"McIre, himsel'," Mrs. McIre answered.

"I maun hae a keek at it," and Duncan, dismounted and walking across the yard, strolled round the stack.

Duncan, in a careless, innocent way, mooched to the rear of the stack, and feigned surprise when he discovered McIre crouched in hiding there.

"Dang it!" he said, with a smile, "I didna expect tae find you here, Tam. Why, yer auld woman tellt the meenister that you were awa' an' wouldna be back a' the afternoon."

McIre, with a guilty look on his face, held up his finger warningly, and said:

"Dinna let on, McClure."

"I willna, Tam—I willna—if y' put ye're signature doon here for a fiver to the building o' the new kirk." And Duncan displayed the list.

"I couldna! I canna afford a saxpence, McClure," McIre answered solemnly.

"You canna?" from Duncan, warmly; "and a heathen like Jorgens can afford a guinea" (showing the signature), "and pays the money doon" (taking the greasy note from his pocket and displaying it). "Hae some respec' for yoursel', Tam!"

McIre seemed in distress.

"Put yoursel' doon for a fiver, mon," Duncan persisted.

"Oh, I canna, McClure!" painfully from McIre.

"Would ye hae it gang roond the country that a scallawag o' the name o' Jorgens gied mair tae a gude cause than McIre," Duncan went on, feelingly.

"Oh, I couldna gie a fixer, McClure," and McIre hung his head.

"Gie four poons, then," McClure suggested, shoving the list and the pencil into the other's hand.

"Make it two guineas," McIre murmured, preparing to write.

"It isna eneugh," Duncan answered; "but it's ane better than Jorgens; sae I'll let ye aff wi' it."

McIre signed; then Duncan strolled leisurly back to the minister and said, "We'd better be getting along noo, pairrson."

Then they said "Good-day" to Mrs. McIre, and rode on.

"I gat auld Tam for twa guineas," Duncan said with a pleased chuckle, when they were out of hearing, and surprised the minister.

"But wasn't he awa'?" he said, with a look of astonishment.

"He wasna ~~th~~ h eneugh dressed, pairrson," Duncan answered, apologising for McIre, "an' he didna care tae meet ye. He's a sensitive auld beggar, is Tam."

"Well, well!" the minister mused sympathisingly; and added after a pause: "But it was indeed liberal of him."

"He's leeberality itself, pairrson," Duncan said, "if he's taken the richt way; but if he isna he's the vera deil tae extrac' money frae. An' wi' himsel' an' the heathen

Jorgens heidin' the list, 'twill be as easy to collec' frae the others as fallin' aff a log."

And Duncan proved a true prophet; for, when the adherents to the church—and a good many who were not—were shown Jorgens's and McIre's names, they each went one better; and at the end of a week's canvass the rebuilding of the church was more than assured. And at the end of the month the carpenter had completed the work, and a larger and more imposing house of worship took the place of the one that had been blown down.

The opening of the new church was celebrated by a Sunday-school picnic, on the eve of which the church committee formed themselves into a surprise party, and waited upon the minister and his wife at the manse.

"We'll hae a few words tae say tae ye directly, pairrson, when ma dray comes," Duncan said, moving to the door and looking out.

The minister didn't understand Duncan, and Mrs. McCulloch smiled wonderingly at him.

The next moment the dray rolled up to the door of the manse, and the committee went out, and, lifting a piano from it, struggled with it inside and set it down in a corner of the room—the minister and his wife the while looking on in astonishment.

"Mr. and Mrs. McCulloch," Duncan said, turning and

facing them, 'on behalf o' the committee here, which doesna include Mr. Bailey, I hae grreat pleasure in makin' ye a praisent o' ye're ain piano."

The tears ran silently down Mrs. McCulloch's cheeks; and the poor parson could only show his gratitude by extending his hand to each of the committee in turn.

There was an awkward silence; and when she had recovered her feelings, Mrs. McCulloch took her place at the piano and started to play "Thy Will be Done."

"It's an awfu' pity," Duncan exclaimed, with sudden enthusiasm, "that I didna think tae bring the pipes."



CHAPTER XIII.

The Wedding.

THREE months later.

“Lonely” Matthewson, an old bachelor without kith or kin in the country, died one day, and everyone was wondering to whom he had left his freehold selection, which was worth a thousand pounds.

The poor parson came along to Duncan McClure’s place.

“I saw Matthewson’s will, and heard it read to-day,” he said to Duncan.

“Did ye, pairrson?” Duncan answered. “I hope the auld beggar didna leave onything tae me.”

The minister smiled and said, “No; he left it all to Danny Dawson.”

“Ye dinna tell me that, pairrson?” Duncan exclaimed with astonishment. “Losh! but I’m glad tae hear he had sae much guid sense; I never expeckit it o’ him; an’ yet I micht hae expeckit it, for he aye spoke weel o’ Danny, an’ wouldna trust onybody else wi’ a pipefu’ o’ tobacco or the

haudin' o' a horse. An' the lan' is worth a thousand. Guid Loard! what pleasure it will gie tae Bailey!"

The poor parson smiled; and Duncan stepped outside from the verandah and yelled to Peter, who was chaff-cutting at the barn, to "sen' the rightfu' heir an' successor to 'Lochnagar' doon at once."

"Send who?" Peter shouted back.

"Danny Dawson, then," Duncan bellowed, "if ye dinna ken him be his title."

And, when Danny came along, Duncan seized him by the hand, and, again ignoring the poor parson, made himself spokesman, and conveyed the good news contained in the will to him.

Danny blushed modestly in the presence of the minister, and said he didn't know "why the old chap should think of him."

"I dinna, either," Duncan said roguishly; "but these ecceentric auld bachelors dae queer things."

The minister smiled at Duncan, then congratulated Danny.

"An', I suppose," McClure added, "we can expeck a weddin' noo?"

Danny blushed some more.

"An' may be ye'll baith consent tae gettin' mairrit

here at 'Loch Ness,' an', if ye dae, I'll gie the deil's ain spree."

"Well, *I* won't mind, Mr. McClure," Danny answered, laughing.

And in less than a month after, on a bright November day, when the brown winter grasses, that covered the face of the great Bushland, had turned to emerald green; when a glorious season was full in view and the selectors' homes were happy and bright; when Morrow's wheat was the pride of the place and Morrow's hopes were high, the people from far and wide gathered at "Loch Ness" to see the wedding and to stay for the dance.

And such a wedding! And such a dance! It was more than a wedding—it was more than a dance. It was a christening as well—it was two christenings. Mrs. MacPherson, taking time by the forelock, brought her new baby to be baptised; and old Tom Jenkins, all the way from the big scrub, came along with his only son, whose appellation, through lack of opportunity, had been neglected for twenty-five years, and who, however, was known as Tom, to have him christened also.

And the interest that was created in the latter ceremony put the marriage and the wedding presents and everything else in the background, and Danny and Dulcie for the moment were forgotten.



THE CHRISTENING OF JAMES THOMAS.

The spectators crowded into the room, and swarmed round the doors and peered in through the windows, and grinned and guffawed at Tom, who looked nervous, and wore long hair which turned up, like fish-hooks, at his coat collar. And, when the poor parson took the glass of water in his hand, Tom shuddered as though he anticipated a cold shower. And while the crowd made jocular remarks outside, Duncan McClure, inside, said in his loud, roguish way to old Jenkins:

“Hae ye quite made up ye’re mind, Mister Jenkins, what tae ca’ yer bairn?”

There was a loud burst of merriment, in the middle of which the “bairn” shook its unkempt head, and said warningly to its father, “I don’t want any other bloomin’ name but the one I’ve got.”

Another burst of merriment followed. And when, in response to the minister, old Jenkins, remembering the last request of his dying wife, stubbornly murmured, “James Thomas,” and the bairn promptly jumped to its feet, and, in a hoarse voice, cried defiantly, “Now, look here, father, I’ll take none of that!” the roof was nearly lifted off the house.

When the ceremonies were completed, and the kissing and the congratulations and the breakfast all over, Duncan McClure blew up his pipes, and the dance commenced.



"GILLIE CALLUM."

And they danced all through the afternoon and all through the night.

And when daylight came, the doors and windows were thronged again with grinning faces, while, in the centre of the ball-room, with one hand upraised and the other on his hip, and while the poor parson looked on and smiled, the burly McClure capered lightly about, hopping dexterously across and in and out the angles of two straps (taking the place of swords) crossed on the floor, dancing the sword dance, while for music old Mrs. McIntyre, from a corner of the room, chanted to him in Gaelic the time-honoured refrain of "Gillie Callum":—

*"Gillie Callum da Phein, da Phein, da Phein.
Gillie Callum da Phein,
Gillie Callum bonn a' Sia.*

*Ruag a'n' Fheannag Ian boiriunn.
Thug I dhachaidh Cual Chonnaidh.
Ian fada, liadh Maide.
Gillie Callum bonn a' Sia."*

THE END.



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